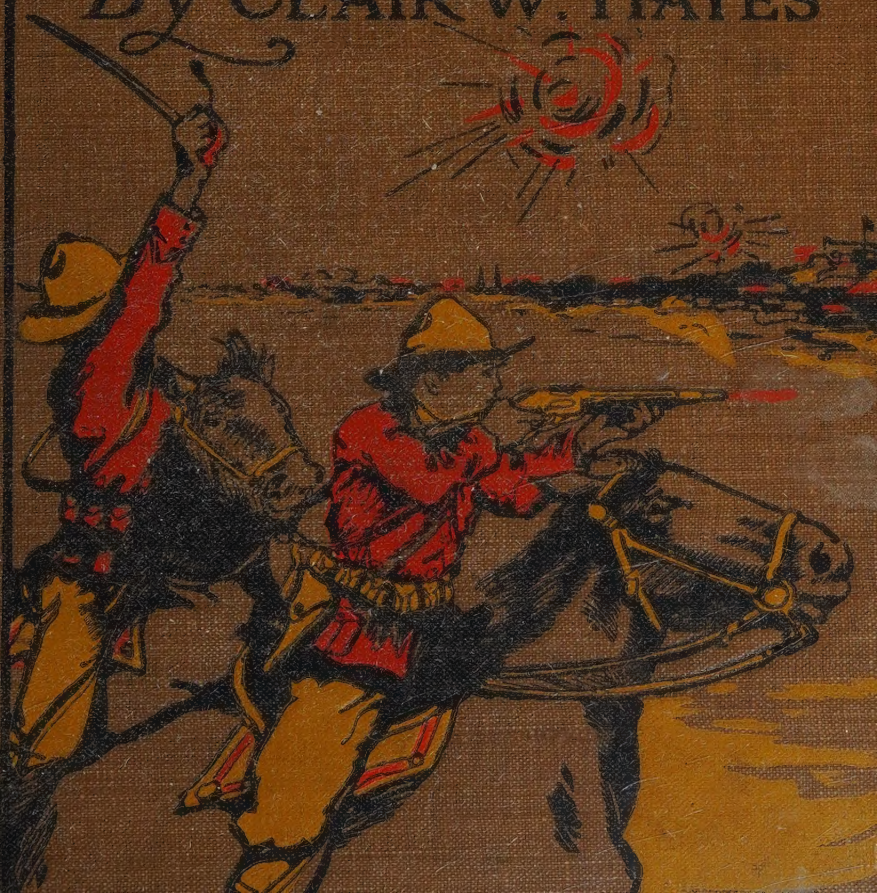
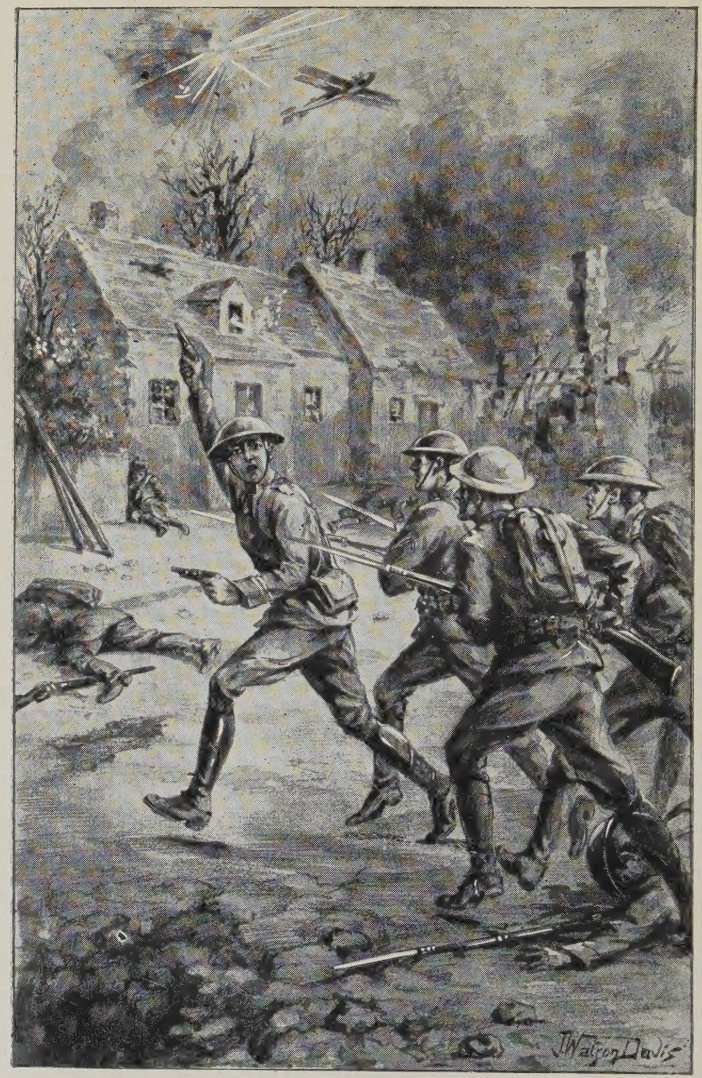
THE BOY ALLIES WITH PERSHING IN FRANCE

By CLAIR W. HAYES



To my dear Cousin
Clifford Stenmoe
from his Cousin
Normen Vaule
Xmas
1919.

CHS-44.



Hal acted quickly. "Sergeant Bowers!" he called sharply. "Take a dozen men and capture that house!" Page 234.

The Boy Allies With Pershing in France.

The Boy Allies

With Pershing In France

OR

Over the Top at Chateau Thierry

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies With the Army Series"

A. L. BURT COMPANY

NEW YORK

THE BOY ALLIES

(Registered in the United States Patent Office)

WITH THE ARMY SERIES

By Clair W. Hayes

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The Boy Allies with Marshal Foch
or, The Closing Days of The Great World War.

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THE BOY ALLIES WITH PERSHING IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

IN NO MAN'S LAND

HAL PAINE and Chester Crawford crouched low in a shell hole in No Man's Land. All morning they had been there and the day had worn on now into the afternoon.

Two hundred yards west of their refuge were the American lines. Sprinters such as Hal and Chester could easily have covered the distance in half a minute; and it was not for want of courage that so far they had failed to make the effort. It was plain common sense that kept them in their present position.

On all sides of them—between the American lines and the most advanced German positions less than two hundred yards from the spot where the opening of this story finds the two boys—the ground was dotted with shell holes similar to the ones in which Hal and Chester found themselves.

Less than fifty yards due north of Hal and Chester was a second inhabited shell hole. From this four German infantrymen had amused themselves during the day by taking occasional shots at the two lads when either exposed himself over the top of their refuge. This was the reason that Hal and Chester, once in the comparative safety of the shell hole, had elected to remain there rather than to risk a dash toward the American lines.

The same reasoning kept the Germans in their refuge. They were not willing to risk a shot from their adversaries by a dash toward the German positions.

It was the twentieth day of March, 1918. Although neither Hal nor Chester knew it then, it was the eve of what was to prove Germany's second grand attempt to sweep back the Allied and American troops and march triumphantly into Paris.

A warm afternoon sun shone down into the shell hole where Hal and Chester were awaiting the coming of darkness, when, they had decided, they would make an effort to reach their own lines.

"Guess the Boches are not enjoying themselves any better than we are," Hal said, as he pulled his cap farther down over his eyes.

"I imagine they're fretting a bit worse," agreed Chester. "You know the Hun doesn't bear up very well under adversity."

"Adversity?" grinned Hal. "It's the sun they are trying to bear up under now."

"Well, whatever it is," declared Chester, somewhat nettled, "I don't believe they like it very well."

"I don't like it either, but what am I going to do about it?" Hal wanted to know.

"You might try a little sprint," Chester suggested.

"Not much. I feel reasonably secure here and I think I'll stick awhile. The thing that mystifies me, though, is why the Germans haven't sent relief to our friends in the next hole."

"On the same reasoning," said Chester, "why hasn't Captain O'Neil made an effort to reach us?"

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess he is playing for the safety of the greatest number," was his reply. "If he tried to rescue us the Germans also would probably advance and that would mean a battle. My idea is that Captain O'Neil has been ordered to avoid that right now!"

"All the same," said Chester, "they are bound to know we're here, and it seems to me they could do something for us."

"Don't croak," said Hal. "We're not running this war, you know, and I guess it's a good thing. Anyhow, we've just as much chance to get out alive as those fellows over there," and he waved an arm in the direction of the shell hole occupied by the Germans.

This act of indiscretion almost proved costly.

When Hal's arm showed above the top of the shell hole a German rifle cracked in the distance. Hal heard the whine of the bullet as it passed within a fraction of an inch of his hand.

"Guess I'd better hug down inside here," he said calmly. "Fritz almost nicked me that time."

The boys became silent. Every moment or two, one or the other, exercising extreme caution, peered toward the enemy, for they did not wish to be caught napping, should the Germans, knowing that the odds were two to one in their favor, decide to rush them.

Chester looked at his watch.

"Almost five o'clock," he said. "It'll be dark soon and then we can get away from here."

"Guess Fritz will be as glad as we will," Hal commented.

As it developed, however, the lads were not to get back to their own lines so easily.

The particular section of the great battle zone in which the lads found themselves when this story opens was perhaps ten miles south and west of St. Quentin, at that time in German hands. The river Oise flowed some five miles to the east and also was held by the enemy.

Darkness now drew on apace and Hal and Chester, making sure that their rifles and side arms were in perfect condition, prepared to quit their refuge.

"Better wait a few minutes," said Chester. "It's

not quite dark. We would still make pretty fair targets on level ground."

"It won't be dark enough to cover us anyhow," Hal replied. "See the moon."

Chester gazed aloft.

"By Jove! That's what I call pretty tough luck," he said. "Well, we'll just have to make the most of it; that's all."

"The sooner we start, then, the sooner we'll get there," declared Hal. "Guns ready?"

"Ready," was Chester's brief response.

"Then let's be moving. Follow me."

Hal got to his feet, but, with a cry, as suddenly dropped down again.

"Hit, Hal?" cried Chester, as he stooped over his chum.

"No," replied Hal.

"What's the matter then?"

"Stick out your nose and have a look," returned Hal.

Chester did so, and what he saw was this:

Twenty-five yards away, and advancing rapidly, were the four Germans who so recently had occupied the neighboring shell hole. They were firing as they advanced and a bullet sped close to Chester.

"Quick with your rifle, Hal!" the boy cried, and bringing his own weapon to his shoulder regardless of his exposed position, he pulled the trigger.

One of the approaching foes staggered slightly,

but he did not fall. The advancing Germans pumped rifle bullets the faster.

"We'll have to stop them or we are done for," muttered Hal, as he stood erect in the shell hole.

Despite the hail of bullets that flew about him, Hal was untouched as he took careful aim and fired at the nearest German.

The man stumbled, threw up his arms and flung his rifle a dozen yards away; then, with a cry, he pitched forward on his face.

"One," said Hal quietly.

A bullet brushed the boy's cheek, leaving a stream of red in its wake, but Hal did not quail.

Again his rifle spoke and a second German went to the ground.

"Odds even now," Hal called to Chester. "Let's get these other two."

Without waiting for a reply, he leaped from the shell hole and dashed forward.

Chester, who had been unfortunate in his marksmanship and so far had not accounted for one of the enemy, followed Hal closely.

The two remaining Germans, now realizing that they had lost the advantage of two-to-one odds, halted in their impetuous dash forward, turned and ran. By this time Hal and Chester were close behind them and the former shouted:

"Surrender!"

For answer the Germans only ran the faster.

"Well," Hal muttered to himself, "if you won't, you won't."

Again he raised his rifle and fired.

A third German dropped to the ground.

Chester, close behind the remaining foe, also cried a command to surrender, but the man ran on.

Loath to shoot the man from behind, Chester sprinted and caught up with him. With his rifle in his right hand, he laid his left on the German's shoulder.

"Halt!" he cried.

The German needed no further urging. He came to an abrupt stop and raised his hands.

"We might as well take this fellow back with us," said Hal, as he approached at that moment.

"Right you are," agreed Chester. "We can't return without some kind of a memento of our trip. A live souvenir is about the best thing I can think of."

"You've got me," mumbled the German at this juncture, "but I want to tell you that before another twenty-four hours have passed, my loss will be repaid with interest."

"Wonder if he knows anything, Hal?" questioned Chester.

"Guess he's not so big that the German high command is tipping him off to all their plans," said Hal. "He's angry and wants to talk. That's about all."

And still it wasn't all; and had the lads had the

foresight to report the words of their prisoner, action might have been taken that would have nipped the second German offensive in the bud.

With no further word to their prisoner, the lads made off in the semi-darkness for the American lines. These they reached in safety.

But hardly had they passed within the lines when a violent cannonading broke out from the German front.

"Sounds as though they were going to start something," said Chester. "Maybe our prisoner knows something after all."

"Oh, I guess not," replied Hal, and once again passed by an opportunity.

Half an hour later, their prisoner having been turned over to Captain O'Neil, the lads sought their own little dugout and much-needed repose.

CHAPTER II

ENTOMBED

Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, in spite of the fact that the United States had not declared war on Germany until April of 1917, already had seen virtually four years of fighting in Europe.

They had been in Berlin when the European conflagration broke out and had been with the Allied armies almost from the first.

The lads had seen active service with the Belgian, British, French, Italian and Russian armies and, through their courage and bravery, had won captaincies in the British army.

When the United States entered the war, Hal and Chester were among the officers sent back to America to help train the young men in the various officers' training camps. When they returned again to the fighting front with the first contingent of American troops to join the Allies, it was as first lieutenants, U. S. A.

Through their courage and resourcefulness, both lads had won the praise of Marshal Joffre, com-

mander of the French forces, in the early days of the war, and of Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander-in-chief. They had also rendered invaluable service to the Allied cause upon the request of General Pershing, in command of the American Expeditionary Forces.

Times had changed greatly since the first campaign, when the German armies advanced to the very doors of Paris soon after war was declared. With America sending thousands of men each month to reinforce the armies of France and Great Britain, it appeared that the Allies soon would have the necessary numerical superiority to drive the enemy out of France and Belgium for all time, and to strike a decisive blow in the war.

So far, while battles of such magnitude as had never been seen before were fought almost daily, there had been nothing in the nature of a conflict that would indicate an ultimate decision. True, the Germans and Austrians, their allies, had staggered the Allies with a crushing drive in Italy; but, through the prompt action of the British and French, they had been driven back again.

It appeared, at this moment, that the next great blow would be delivered by the Allies; that, with her numerical superiority overcome, her output of munitions of war surpassed, Germany from this time on must remain on the defensive in an effort to retain what ground she had won in the early days

of the war and to keep her enemies off German soil.

On the twentieth day of March the great battle line extended, roughly, from Ostend on the North Sea south to within a few miles of Ypres, thence to Bailleul and Lens. Here it was pushed slightly east, touching Bapaume and Peronne. In the Soissions region the Germans were in possession of Chauny and Laon. The battle line continued south to the river Aisne, and then followed that stream east into Alsace-Lorraine.

Everywhere, up to this time—that is, since the early days of the war—success had seemed to crown the efforts of the Allies on the Western front. On the Eastern front, however, it was different. Through German intrigue, Russia had been removed as a belligerent and more than a million and a half of German troops had been released to reinforce the hard-pressed Germans on the west.

Though the loss of Russia's aid in the war was a severe blow to the Allies, it was more than offset by the entrance of the United States into the conflict. American soldiers were being rushed to Europe with all possible dispatch and were taking their places on the firing line. Already they had covered themselves with glory. So far, however, they had taken part only in what the official dispatches called "skirmishes," although, compared to battles of previous wars, they could be classed as engagements of more than passing importance.

But the time was coming, and coming soon, when the Yankee troops would go "over the top" under command of General Pershing in such force and with such courage that the Germans could not stand before them.

Through the decision of an Allied war council, in which the United States participated, General Foch had been made the supreme commander of the Allied forces—British, American and Italian included. It was believed that through this unity of command greater success would be achieved than had yet been manifest.

And the time for Marshal Foch to prove his mettle was at hand.

Under the personal direction of General von Hindenburg, the greatest military genius that the war had yet produced, the German forces had been massed for their second effort to break through to Paris. Although Marshal Foch had some slight inkling of the impending attack, he had been unable to tell just where it would be made. True, his air scouts had flown time and again over the enemy lines, but so far they had failed to learn where the foe would strike.

As it developed, the first thrust was made in the north, with Ypres as the apparent objective; although after the first few days of the drive it became apparent that Hindenburg's real plan was to get behind Paris from the north, after driving a

wedge between the French and British armies. This, through the ablest of strategy, Field Marshal Haig was able to prevent.

Bailleul, Lens and other important railroad centers fell to the Germans in the second great enemy drive of the war. Suddenly, when apparently checked in the north, the enemy struck farther south, capturing Bapaume, Albert, Peronne and other important towns and villages.

When the Allied line at last held there, the attack was pressed against Ypres.

But this second drive was to fail as had all others, with a terrible loss to the Germans in manpower. Marshal Foch sacrificed ground to save lives, while, on the other hand, the German high command threw their men forward with an utter disregard for loss of life.

To Hal and Chester, after their return from No Man's Land on the night before the opening of the German advance, it seemed that they had just closed their eyes when they were awakened by a sudden loud detonation apparently in their very ears.

As both lads jumped to their feet they were borne down by an avalanche of dirt and concrete. Although neither lad knew at that moment what had happened, a German bomb had burst squarely over their dugout, shattering the little place.

The boys slept in improvised bunks close to each other, and in jumping to their feet, they came closer

together. They lay on the floor face down as t
debris continued to rain on them. For the mom
neither was able to speak.

At last the shower of debris ceased, and H
made an effort to rise. He dropped down to
floor again suddenly with an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Chester, sitting

"Matter is," said Hal, "that I bumped my he
Seems like the roof has fallen in."

Chester now made an effort to rise. He got to
feet more cautiously, however, and so did not h
himself. Nevertheless, the lad gave an exclamati
of alarm.

"Bump your head, too?" asked Hal.

"No," was the reply.

"What's the trouble then?"

"Trouble is," said Chester, "that we seem to
buried in here."

"Oh, I guess it's not as bad as that," said H
hopefully, and, getting to his feet cautiously,
began to explore.

The dugout, before the explosion, had beer
small building, possibly fifteen feet wide and
many feet long. It was entirely covered by a roof
wood. This, Hal found by exploration, seemed
have come down to within five feet of the floor
to be wedged down by a heavy weight outside.

"We're buried, all right," said Hal at last, "
I guess we can get out. We'll have to dig."

"All right," said Chester. "Let's begin. I've got a knife here."

Hal also produced a knife and the lads fell to work upon the roof at one end. After half an hour of strenuous work Hal sat down and wiped a moist brow.

"Don't seem to be accomplishing much," he said.

"I should say not," said Chester as he sat down beside his chum.

"I'll tell you," said Hal after a pause, "I don't think we'll ever dig our way out with these tools," and he tapped his knife.

"Well, what then?" asked Chester. "We can't stay here forever. We'll suffocate. In fact, the air is already getting bad."

"I noticed that," Hal declared, "which is the reason that I say we can't get out by digging. We might eventually dig our way out, if given time; but the poisonous air will overcome us long before then."

"We've got to do something, Hal," said Chester. "We can't perish here like rats in a trap without making an effort to save ourselves."

"Right. Then I've a suggestion to offer."

"Let's have it."

"It's dangerous," said Hal quietly, "and may mean only a quicker death."

"Anything is better than this inaction," Chester declared.

"Well," said Hal, "near my bunk are two hand grenades. My idea is this! Place them close to the fallen roof where we have been digging, come back here and pot them with our revolvers. The explosion should blow the roof off."

"Or bury us a little deeper," said Chester grimly.

"Of course," said Hal. "However, it's the only chance I see. What do you say?"

"Try it, of course," said Chester promptly. "It's the only way. Get out your bombs."

Hal did so, and a moment later he had placed them to his satisfaction.

"Guess I can hit one in the dark," he said. "Hug down close, Chester."

Chester did so and Hal made himself as small as possible. A moment later there was a sharp report, followed by a heavy explosion.

CHAPTER III

NEW FRIENDS

HAL's last conscious moment was filled with the roar that followed his shot aimed at the hand grenades in the far corner of his underground tomb. When again he was able to realize that he still lived his first thought was of Chester, who had been near when he pressed the trigger of his automatic in his desperate attempt to escape.

The lad was very dizzy as he staggered to his feet. First he felt himself over carefully. He found he uninjured except from shock.

"Chester," he called.

There was no answer.

Again and again Hal called to his friend, meanwhile moving through the debris that littered the ground, until at last he came upon the unconscious form of Chester fully a hundred yards from the spot where he himself had come to life.

Quickly Hal bent over and raised Chester's head to his knee. He still breathed and as the lad glanced around he noted a pool of stagnant water.

Laying Chester down on the ground carefully, Hal hurried to the pool. There he soaked his handkerchief and hurried back to his friend.

After some effort on Hal's part Chester showed signs of returning consciousness as the cold water began to have its effect. Then Chester sat up.

"Where am I?" he asked, moving his head feebly in a vain attempt to pierce the darkness with his eyes.

Hal was forced to smile at this remark.

"I guess you are not in such bad shape after all," he said. "Anybody that can wake up and start off with a question like that is not going to die for some time to come."

Chester struggled from Hal's arms and got to his feet. He surveyed the ruins of the erstwhile dugout in the darkness and then said:

"Your getting to be a pretty fair shot with that gun of yours, Hal."

"Thanks," said Hal dryly. "You were so still and quiet when I found you, though, that I had begun to think I had done a pretty bad job."

"Well," said Chester, "we're on the outside again, at all events. I don't feel as well as I might, either, and I vote that we get away from here. I'd like to lay my hands on the Boche who is responsible for interrupting my sleep like this. I'd show him a thing or two."

"Not in your present condition, I guess," was Hal's rejoinder.

"Oh, I'm still alive and kicking," returned Chester. "But listen to the guns."

Indeed, it seemed that the roar of heavy artillery from both the Allied and German lines exceeded in ferocity anything that either lad had heard in their fours years of fighting.

"You can bet there is something of importance going on," was Hal's comment. "But I agree with you, Chester, we've time enough later to learn what it's all about. It's time now to find a place where we can bunk for the rest of the night. Let's be moving."

Together the lads walked away in the darkness toward the section of the American encampment where a glimmer of light showed in the distant dugout.

"We'll wake these fellows up and see if they'll let us spend the night with them," said Hal, as they approached the dugout.

"Suits me," Chester agreed; "and if they have any objections to our company, I'm in favor of dispossessing them."

"That might be rather a large order, in our present shape," said Hal. "However, we'll see what they have to say."

They approached the dugout and tapped lightly on the door. There was no answer to their knock. Hal tried again, but with the same result.

"If there is anybody there, they are good sleep-

ers," declared Hal. "If I don't get an answer this time, we'll go in regardless."

"Suits me," was Chester's response.

Again Hal knocked on the door and waited a moment. There was no response from within.

"Well, here goes," the lad declared.

With that he threw open the door.

Inside the lads surveyed the dugout. There was no one there.

"We're in luck," said Hal. "We'll just make ourselves at home, and if the owner objects we'll get out again, or put up an argument. That's all."

"In that event," said Chester, "me for the first bunk."

He turned in at once. Hal followed suit, making himself as comfortable as possible in a bunk across the little room.

Outside the heavy cannonading continued without cessation.

Two hours later—it may have been 4 o'clock in the morning—Hal was awakened by a rough hand on his shoulder and the sound of a rough voice.

"Come up out of there," said the voice. "This war has reached a pretty pass when a man can't go out for a few minutes without somebody stealing his bunk."

Hal, still half asleep, sat up.

"What's the row?" he wanted to know.

"What's the row?" repeated the man who stood

above him. "I like that. I come back to my own little bunk, find it occupied and the occupant wants to know what's the row. Why shouldn't there be a row, I'd like to know?"

Hal got slowly to his feet and gazed at the man who had thus rudely disturbed his slumber.

"A marine, eh?" he said.

"Right," was the reply. "Lieutenant Ulysses Smith, of the —th division. "I'm obliged to you for keeping my bed warm, but if it's all the same to you, I'm ready to climb in myself."

"Well, Smith," said Hal, "it's your bed. Hop in."

The marine eyed the lad closely.

"First tell me who you are and what you are doing here," he said.

In a few words Hal recounted the adventure he and Chester had gone through.

"Well," said the marine, "I guess I don't want that bed after all. You need it worse than I do. Help yourself. I'll bunk on the floor here."

"Oh, no," was Hal's reply. "The floor is plenty good enough for me. It's your bed, you know."

"True enough," said Smith, "but at the same time, I've been out on a little frolic and don't need it half as bad as you do. So you're a lieutenant in the regulars, eh?"

"Right," said Hal.

"Haven't much to do yet, eh?"

"Oh, yes," was Hal's rejoinder. "You see, I put

in almost three years in this war before Uncle Sam decided to get in."

The marine officer looked his astonishment.

"Yes," Hal continued, "my friend and I"—he indicated Chester, who continued to sleep through the conversation—"have seen active service with most of the Allied forces."

Smith held out a hand.

"I'm a veteran myself," he said. "I've campaigned in the Philippines and in some of the South American troubles. Of course, I've never been mixed up in a scrap like this and I've a lot to learn. I'll appreciate anything you can tell me."

"It's a little early in the morning for a talkfest," said Hal with a smile, "but I've no doubt that when the sun comes up and we've had sleep a plenty and some good grub that I can entertain you a bit."

"I'll be all ears, as my friend Jenkins would say," replied Smith. "Jenkins," he explained, "is my bunkie—Lieutenant Jenkins, by the way."

"Guess he'll be back hunting his bed before long," said Hal.

"Shouldn't be surprised. Guess that's him now," he added, as footsteps approached without.

A moment later a second officer in Uncle Sam's marine corps uniform entered the dugout.

"Meet my friend Lieutenant Paine, Jenkins," said Smith. "He dropped in rather suddenly, Fritz having put his own bunk house out of business. I've

invited him and his friend to spend the night with us. It won't be the first time we have slept two in a bunk."

"Guess it won't be the last, either," was Jenkins' reply; "at least, not if this war lasts as long as I figure it will. You're a lieutenant in the regulars, I see," he added. "I'm afraid you'll get a chance sooner than we will."

"Oh, you'll be in it, too," said Hal, smiling. "Uncle Sam is going to need every man he has over here, and all he can send, to finish this job."

"Well, we'll finish it, all right," declared Jenkins. "I'd be willing to cut ten years off my life to get a chance at these Huns."

"You'll get it, never fear," replied Hal.

"If I don't," said Jenkins, "I'll start a little war of my own."

"Don't pay any attention to him, Paine," laughed Smith. "He's not half as bloodthirsty as he would have you believe. But come, let's turn in. To-morrow is another day."

"Right," said Jenkins. "I'm with you."

Ten minutes later the dugout was in darkness and only the heavy breathing of the four sleepers proclaimed that it was inhabited.

CHAPTER IV

THE "DEVIL DOGS"

"So you are a couple of 'Devil Dogs,' eh?"

The speaker was Chester. It was morning again and Hal had just introduced his chum to his newly found friends.

Lieutenant Jenkins smiled.

"I wouldn't say that," was his reply. "Smith and I haven't earned the right yet to be called that. But we are marine officers, if that's what you mean."

"That's just what I mean," said Chester. "To tell you the truth, I never have found out just where the marines won that name, but I know it wasn't bestowed without reason."

"The name is the result of the first encounter between American marines and Germans in the Soissons region," returned Lieutenant Jenkins. "I don't know the details of that scrap, but from all accounts it must have been a warm one. There were only a few of our fellows in that engagement—only the fraction of a division. They were flanked right and left by French and British.

"The enemy came on recklessly in the face of a heavy artillery fire. Under a rain of shells from the German lines, the right and left wings—the French and British—gave ground slightly. But the marines held, and more. In the face of what seemed utter annihilation, our fellows suddenly dashed forward. To the enemy it must have appeared the wildest folly. Perhaps it was. But it saved the day.

"So great was the enemy's astonishment that for a moment his fire slackened. In that moment our fellows were upon the Germans with the bayonet. The enemy broke and fled, the marines in hot pursuit. At this juncture the wings rallied and came to our support. The Germans were driven back to their own trenches with heavy losses."

"But the name," said Chester; "who was responsible for the name, the 'Devil Dogs'?"

"Oh, the name," repeated Jenkins. "I believe the Germans themselves were responsible for that. After the battle, as I understand it, the German soldiers told one another that we were 'devils' and 'dogs.' I guess someone joined the words."

"At all events," laughed Hal, "you fellows have some reputation to live up to."

"And we'll live up to it, never fear," declared Jenkins.

"I hope so," interposed Lieutenant Smith. "It has often been said that the morale of the Ameri-

can marines is the best in the world, and it is said with reason. Gathered as they are from all parts of the country, and chiefly from the rougher element, it is only natural that they should be fighters par excellence. The slogan that you have seen on thousands of billboards, 'The first to fight,' has had its appeal. To the true marine a fight is the salt of life."

"So I have always understood," said Chester. "I know that in times of peace the marine was considered a bad customer. Now that he has come into his own he is bound to give a good account of himself."

"He has always done that, no matter in what part of the world he has been called into action," said Hal. "Take the troubles in Nicaragua, San Domingo, and even at Vera Cruz, when it seemed that we must wage war upon that country. The marines were always first on the job, and from all accounts they cleaned things up wonderfully well."

"Well," said Chester, "we have talked to you fellows too long now. We've work to do, and I suppose you have also. It's time, Hal, that we reported to Captain O'Neil. He may have something in sight for us. We'll see you fellows again soon, I hope."

"Thanks," replied Lieutenant Smith. "I am sure we hope so, too."

The four shook hands all around and Hal and Chester a few moments later, learned to what extent

the German general staff appeared willing to go in their efforts to drive a wedge between the French and British lines and then execute a flanking movement upon the French capital itself.

"We've our work cut out for us the next few days, and possibly weeks," the American captain told the two lads. "Just listen to the roar of those guns. You boys have been in this war almost four years, but I'll venture to say you have never heard the like before."

It was true. Never, so far as Hal and Chester could remember, had the fire of the heavy German batteries been so terrific. The very earth quivered under their feet from the shock. While the Allied artillery was returning the German fire, the guns had not been concentrated upon the foe's positions; but the activity of the French, British and American artillery was soon to equal that of the enemy and the two, combined, were speedily engaged in what was to prove the greatest artillery action in history.

All day long and into the night the great guns pounded on without cessation. Hastily, under the personal direction of divisional commanders, American, British and French troops strengthened their positions that they might be better able to repel the foe when the infantry advanced to the attack under cover of the heavy German barrage.

All day long and far into the night Hal and Ches-

ter rushed hither and thither within the lines with orders. Now, an hour after midnight, they found themselves for the first time with nothing to do.

"Whew!" said Hal, as he sat down on the edge of the dugout to which they had been assigned. "This has been the busiest day I have put in in months."

"Here, too," Chester agreed, "and I'll bet a hat that to-morrow and the days to follow will be just as bad."

"Wouldn't be surprised," declared Hal. "It's only a matter of hours now until the Germans advance to the attack."

"Well," said Chester, "we're prepared for them. They'll know they've been in a battle before they break through here."

"Right. The thing that I am trying to figure out is just about how many men von Hindenburg is willing to sacrifice in what I believe will be the last enemy offensive on a large scale."

"It will cost him a terrible toll to come through here," declared Chester grimly.

"Of course. But if he really means to break through, and the movement is not a feint to cover an advance elsewhere, he won't worry about the sacrifice in human lives. He will attempt to break through, cost what it may. If successful, he'll probably swing south toward Paris."

"Well, he won't get there."

"I don't think he will, either. But all those possibilities must be taken into consideration."

"We don't have to worry about them," said Chester. "I guess Marshal Foch and his staff haven't overlooked any such possibilities. All we've got to do is what we're told."

"Right you are, Chester. Nevertheless, we're free to speculate if we feel so disposed."

As Hal had predicted, the German attack came soon. Under cover of the semi-darkness of early morning, the gray-clad hosts advanced to the attack. For miles along the long battle line, Germans streamed from their trenches and marched slowly toward the Allied positions only a few hundred yards away.

The enemy came on calmly and with no appearance of haste. Machine guns from British, French and American positions poured a hail of bullets into the advancing ranks; but the gaps made by this fire were immediately filled and the Germans still moved forward, firing with monotonous regularity as they did so.

Now they reached the first-line American trenches and poured in. Desperately the Yankee troops fought to drive them out. But, outnumbered as they were by the enemy, they eventually were forced to retire. This retirement was ordered primarily so that the Americans might be kept in contact with the French, to the north, who were forced to give ground under the impetuous advance of the foe.

All day the battle raged, first at close quarters,

and when the Allies retired farther, the big German guns resumed the bombardment. At nightfall of the second day it became clear to every man in the battle that the German objective, primarily at least, was Ypres, one of the most important towns at the front still in possession of the Allies.

Still the Allies gave ground as the enemy advanced. So, at the close of the fourth day of fighting, the Germans had gained miles of territory and seemed in imminent danger of encircling the city of Ypres.

But the German advance had been made at terrible cost. Thousands upon thousands of German dead strewed the field. In these few days of fighting the German losses had been greater than in any battle of the war. The losses of the Allies were comparatively light.

And still Marshal Foch withdrew his troops slowly.

It now became apparent that the commander-in-chief of the Allied forces was ready to sacrifice ground if he could conserve lives. Each day the enemy advanced in the face of the terrible Allied fire his manpower grew weaker. If these tactics were continued, it was plain to the Allied general staff that the enemy must slow down if for no other reason than sheer exhaustion; at least he must slow down until his divisions could be reorganized and return to the fray.

Each day territory won by the Germans grew less; and then the British line before Ypres held. It became apparent that Marshal Foch had yielded as much ground in that section as he intended to give up. Immediately von Hindenburg changed his tactics and struck farther south, apparently hoping to catch the French there by surprise. But after an initial advance of a few miles the first day, the French line also braced and checked the foe.

Again the German commander hurled his tired troops against the British at Ypres, but this time he failed even to dent the line. Gradually the fighting grew less and less and soon the opposing armies settled down quietly and only the voices of the big guns, with occasional infantry raids, indicated that the war was still in progress on the West front.

The German gains in territory in this battle had been large, but so had their losses. Marshal Foch had conserved his own man-power with a genius more than rivaling that of von Hindenburg's strategy, so it appeared that the advantage was with the Allies.

Thus the second attempt of the German emperor to carry the war to the gates of Paris had failed. A feeling of absolute confidence ran through the Allied army. The Germans had showed the best they had and it was not good enough to win through. Americans, British and French now eagerly awaited the word that would open an offensive by the Allies.

CHAPTER V

A RAID

South of the city of Ypres itself and less than six miles east flows the river Orcuq. The crossing of the river and the capture of the town of Dun by the American troops will rank as one of the most gallant feats of the operations in the Ypres sector.

In this action Hal and Chester played important rôles. The troops which accomplished this work may well rank as heroes, for their work in crossing the stream was a strategic move of unusual daring.

The crossing involved the forcing of a way over a 160-foot stream, a half-mile stretch of mud and a 60-foot canal in the face of a frightful enemy fire.

The Germans held the east side of the river, hastily dug trenches less than 100 yards from the shore making a crossing by the Allies a seemingly impossible task.

The order to cross the river came at mid-afternoon, two days after the German offensive at Ypres had been definitely checked. Hal and Chester car-

ried the order themselves. It was signed by General Pershing, who was at the front at that moment, and was directed to Major General Lawrence, in command of the —st division.

The troops received their instructions under a sun which was shining for the first time in days. The men knew almost as well as their commanders the difficulty of the task and realized how well-nigh impossible its accomplishment would be. Yet they never doubted or hesitated.

The orders were to send over one brigade first—and if it failed, to send another—and others, one after the other—if it became necessary. It was with the dash that is traditional in the American army that the Yankee troops tackled the problem. Theoretically they had the choice of crossing anywhere for five miles. Actually they were limited to one point, where two-thirds of a mile of mud lay between the river itself and the canal that roughly parallels the river.

The Germans were too firmly intrenched at all other points. They had not protected themselves with trenches here because they never dreamed the Americans would be so daring as to try to force the passage. This was a short distance north of Velliers.

First came the call for swimmers from the first brigade. Not a man who could swim a stroke failed to stand out when the call came. Those whom their officers thought fit were put in the van.

With these went Hal and Chester.

It was intended to attack in this way on the theory that the swimmers were less likely to be hit by the Germans, owing to the fact that they would be nearly submerged. On the other hand, they would carry with them ropes and other paraphernalia for assisting men across who were unable to swim.

A perfect rain of fire from the Germans met these first Americans, as, under command of Captain Donaldson, Hal and Chester, they waded into the stream. The enemy had ensconced himself up the east bank with carefully selected machine gun positions, which raked every point of the bank where efforts to land could be enfiladed or met with direct fire.

Some men were killed in the water. More were drowned after having been wounded, for no unwounded man dared stop to rescue a comrade if the maneuver were to be successful.

Captain Donaldson made no effort to keep his men in formation as they swam rapidly across the river. There would be time enough for formation when they were safely ashore. Each man, when he waded into the water, struck out for himself, his chief aim being to reach the opposite shore as quickly as possible.

No bullet touched Hal or Chester as they swam at the head of their men. Bullets kicked up the water all about them, but both lads seemed to bear charmed lives.

Suddenly a German bullet pierced the forehead of Captain Donaldson, and the brave officer threw up his hands and sank without a word. Instantly, realizing that there must be a single head to the party, Hal assumed command.

"Faster, men!" he called. "We're almost there!"

The troops exerted themselves to further efforts. Men sank every moment, hit by the enemy fire, but the others swam on apparently utterly oblivious to the danger that faced them.

Notwithstanding their losses and the fact that the swimmers could not fight back, nor even defend themselves, the bulk of the first expedition reached the east bank of the river with lines that were drawn taut across the stream. Others floated on rafts and collapsible boats. These men had less success than the swimmers, for they were better targets for the enemy's fire, and the boats could be easily sunk by bullets even if the occupants were not hit.

Close to where the swimmers had crossed, engineers, who had been drawn across, now began to throw over pontoon bridges and a tiny foot bridge. The pontoons crumbled under the German fire, but the foot bridge remained intact and added materially to the constantly increasing number of men on the east bank. Soon after dark the first brigade was across the first barrier and more men were ready to make the journey.

After the swimmers headed by Hal and Chester

had crossed the river, they waited eagerly until their comrades arrived with rifles, ammunition and side arms. Then they moved forward to the second phase of the perilous undertaking. This was the crossing of the kilometer of mud stretching between the river and the canal beyond, which, though it was under enemy fire, was not held by infantry. The Americans stumbled across the mud under a withering fire, firing as they advanced. From the rear the American lines were being constantly increased, so that now instead of the handful of men who had forced the crossing, there were enough American troops to offer a formidable fighting front.

Their feet sank into the mud as they advanced and soon the pace of the men was slowed down to a laborious walk. But there was no hesitancy in the ranks—no faltering. The men were too anxious to come to close quarters with the foe for that. The German guns played terrible havoc with the Yankees, but the rest pushed through.

Now came the third phase of the advance. This constituted the crossing of the canal, with its sheer sides and the Germans almost at the top of the eastern bank.

Here again the party, led by Hal and Chester, threw aside their arms and plunged into the water.

"Forward men!" cried Chester, as he plunged into the canal.

The men took up the cry with cheers, and swam rapidly after him.

Hal kept close to Chester's side. Soon they reached the opposite shore, where lines were again drawn taut and other men were pulled across on rafts and in boats.

Once more the engineers got busy and almost as if by magic, bridges appeared.

Troops crossed them at the double. The bridges stood the enemy fire bravely and troops hurried across by hundreds.

Soaking wet, and with water dripping from every garment, immediately he set foot ashore and weapons were thrust in his hands by eager men behind, Hal, thinking to cover the landing of those still to come, ordered an advance.

Nothing loath, the first mere handful of men went forward at the double.

In vain the Germans, in their hastily entrenched positions, tried to stop them with rifle and machine-gun fire. The Americans were not to be stopped. They had undergone too strenuous a time getting across to be halted now.

Right for the German trenches they dashed and the enemy, his morale broken by the Yankee spirit, offered only a half-hearted resistance.

In vain the German officers tried to make their men fight. Blows from the flat of their swords and Teutonic imprecations failed to bring order out of chaos as the men from Yankeeland advanced with wild shouts and cries.

Into the trenches leaped the Americans, cutting down what few of the enemy offered resistance there. Apparently the Germans were too bewildered to fight with any idea of cohesion. Hundreds surrendered. Others dropped their weapons and fled.

From the west side of the canal and river fresh American troops advanced to the support of their comrades. General Lawrence himself crossed with them.

Despite the darkness, an advance was ordered and the American troops moved toward the village of Dun.

This little village, though exceedingly small before the war, was now an important railway center, and, realizing the results that could be attained if he followed up his initial success, General Lawrence determined to give the enemy no rest.

From the distance German artillery now had taken up the battle and shells dropped frequently in the newly-won American positions. Nevertheless, the Yankee troops reformed coolly enough and stood patiently under fire until the order at last came to advance.

Hal and Chester, now that their part of the task had been carried out successfully, personally reported to General Lawrence the death of Captain Donaldson, who had been in command of the first crossing party.

"It's a pity," General Lawrence took time to say.

"He was a good officer and a brave man. I wish both of you young men would stay by me," he added. "I watched you as you crossed and know that your courage cannot be questioned. Also, I have noticed your service stripes. My officers are few now, and I may have need of you."

Hal and Chester clicked their heels, saluted and stood at attention.

General Lawrence gave his commands clearly and quickly.

The First and Second brigades were to move upon Dun, from the west, while the Third and Fourth, making a slight detour, were to attack from the north. General Lawrence aimed to launch his attack from both places simultaneously, and for this reason the Third and Fourth brigades moved an hour before the First and Second.

"Lieutenant Paine!" said General Lawrence.

Hal approached and saluted.

"My compliments to Colonel Adams and order him to move immediately with the Third and Fourth brigades. He will attack the village from the north an hour after daylight."

Hal saluted again and hurried away.

"Lieutenant Crawford!"

Chester approached and saluted.

"My compliments to Colonel Gregory and order him to attack from the front an hour after daylight. Inform him that Colonel Adams will attack from the north simultaneously."

Chester saluted and followed Hal from the general's presence.

In the heart of each lad was a great impatience, for each longed for the action to commence. Nevertheless, outwardly, both were perfectly cool; for they had learned long ago and by hard experience that in the heat of battle the things that stood them in best stead were strong arms and cool heads.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTURE OF THE VILLAGE

WHILE the First and Second Brigades under Colonel Gregory prepared for the early morning attack, the Third and Fourth, under command of Colonel Adams, marched immediately upon receiving the instructions that Hal carried. In the natural course of events Hal, his errand accomplished successfully, would have returned immediately to report to General Lawrence. In fact he had wheeled and was about to walk away when Colonel Adams stopped him.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I shall move at once in accordance with instructions, but I would prefer that you remain here and that one of my men reported to General Lawrence in your stead."

"Very well, sir," was Hal's reply, although he could not fathom the colonel's reasons.

Colonel Adams explained:

"I lost most of my officers in the crossing of the canal. I can use you to great advantage. By the way, I don't seem to recall your name."

"Paine, sir."

"Very good. Lieutenant, you will report at once to Captain Graham, of the —th marines."

He saluted and walked away. He was somewhat surprised, for he did not know that a body of marines had crossed the river with the infantry so recently.

"I'll bet a hat my friends Jenkins and Smith are around some place," he told himself as he strode rapidly ahead.

He located the body of marines with little difficulty and reported at once to Captain Graham. As the lad had predicted to himself, Lieutenants Smith and Jenkins were there, and were almost the first to see him.

"Well, I see you're on the job," exclaimed Smith, stepping forward as Hal left Captain Graham after reporting and delivering his message from Colonel Adams.

"Right," returned Hal, "and glad to be here, particularly so as we are about to march."

"That so?" said Jenkins. "Where to?"

"Dun," replied Hal. "General Lawrence has determined to push his advantage."

"Wow!" exclaimed Jenkins. "Hear that, Smith? Didn't I tell you that once we got started we would be kept on the jump?"

"I'm glad to hear it," said Lieutenant Smith, who appeared to be considerably more quiet and dignified

than his companion. "When do we start, or do you know?"

"Immediately," said Hal, "and if I am not mistaken, there is the signal now."

A bugle sounded attention. The men sprang to their places and the ranks closed in the darkness. A moment later came the command to march.

A few moments later Hal found himself in command of a detachment at the extreme right of the advancing column, where Captain Graham had assigned him. Because of the unfortunate lack of higher officers, Hal would command this detachment during the impending engagement. A short distance to Hal's left Lieutenant Jenkins strode with his men. Lieutenant Smith had been called to the detachment that made up the left wing.

Silently the American columns moved through the darkness. The order had been passed along the line that there must be no talking. It would be well to advance as close to the village as possible without being discovered by the enemy.

From the distance the German artillery still hurled shells toward the American lines at infrequent intervals, but there was nothing now in the nature of a consistent cannonading.

Two hours' march brought Colonel Adams' columns to the far edge of a small but dense wood. Beyond could be seen a few twinkling lights in the village of Dun.

Colonel Adams called a halt. Here the Americans would wait until an hour after daylight, at which time Colonel Gregory would advance to the attack from the west of the village.

The hours passed slowly and the men fidgeted. They would be cool enough when the time for action arrived, but resting quietly in the darkness and being allowed to utter no word, they grew restless.

Gradually it grew light and the men recovered their spirits. The hour of attack was approaching and the troops were anxious to be about their work.

Hal glanced at his watch in the half light.

"Must be about time," he muttered.

The words had hardly left his mouth when the signal came, the shrill clear notes of a bugle sounding a charge.

A wild Yankee cheer followed the bugle call and the Americans dashed forward at the double.

In this particular section of the field there were no trenches to be won. The German positions had been fortified so recently that the enemy had had no time to dig himself in. But with the warning of the advance, the German commander rushed his men into formation and awaited the attack.

Machine guns were hurried forward and brought into play upon the men in khaki advancing across the open field.

Under the commands of their officers, the Americans broke their close formation and scattered out,

thus making a more difficult target for the enemy. Nevertheless, the enemy rifle and machine-gun fire took a heavy toll in the advancing ranks.

To the far left of the German line, on Hal's right, a machine gunner was doing fearful execution with a gun that was hidden in a clump of trees at that point.

"By Jove!" muttered Hal. "That fellow is tearing things up. We've got to stop him."

To think with Hal was to act.

As his men dashed forward, he told off half a dozen and, turning over his command to Lieutenant Edgerton, led them sharply farther to the right. Thus they were able to approach the clump of trees without being exposed to the full force of the concealed machine-gun fire.

Bullets from other parts of the field fell among the little party, however, and three men dropped. Besides Hal, this now left three of the original party of seven.

The four were almost upon the little clump of trees before the German who was hidden there with his machine gun noticed their approach, so intent had he been upon his other foes. When he espied them, he turned his gun sharply.

A hail of bullets swept the field.

With a cry to his men, Hal had thrown himself flat upon the ground even before the German had turned his gun in their direction, and thus Hal es-

caped unscathed. Two of his men, however, were not so fortunate.

Besides Hal, there was now but one man able to fight. Together he and Hal sprang to their feet and dashed forward. Again they escaped what seemed almost certain death by hurling themselves to the ground. A moment later they were up and dashing forward again.

Hal sprang at the German machine gunner from the left, while the remaining marine attacked him from the right. Unable to fire effectively again, and caught between two fires, the German rose, stepped quickly back and produced a revolver.

He took a snapshot at Hal, but the bullet went wild.

Before he could fire again, the marine was upon him and sent him staggering back to escape a bayonet thrust.

Immediately the German dropped his revolver, raising both hands.

"Kamerad!" he cried.

Hal lowered a revolver which he had trained upon the Boche and the marine lowered his rifle.

As he did so, the German suddenly dropped his hand to his belt, drew a second revolver and fired point-blank at the marine. The latter side-stepped swiftly, but although he moved promptly enough he was not equal to the task of escaping the bullet altogether. The ball which the German had aimed at his heart pierced the man's left arm.

Before the German could fire again and even before Hal could bring his own revolver to bear, the marine jumped forward with a roar.

"Treachery, eh!" he shouted. "I'll show you!"

He dropped his rifle as he jumped and threw both arms around the German. With his right hand he pinioned the man's left arm while he seized his opponent's right wrist with strong fingers. Gradually the man's arms described an arc until his own revolver was pointed at his head. There was a flash and a sharp report. The marine stepped back and the German crumbled up on the ground. The marine surveyed him disdainfully.

"Kamerad, eh!" he muttered. "Well, I guess you won't fool anybody else."

Hal looked at the marine in some amazement. The man was terribly angry and as Hal gazed at the powerful figure he could not keep thinking that there were few soldiers in the German army could stand against him.

"Come!" said Hal sharply. "Man the machine gun there. Wheel it about and open on the enemy to the left."

"Very well, sir," said the marine quietly, and followed instructions.

Unaware that Americans had approached so close in this section of the field, and probably placing reliance upon the machine gun that Hal and the marine had just captured, the Germans exposed

themselves somewhat recklessly. Thus they were caught in a trap when their own weapon was turned against them.

With loud cries of alarm, the enemy ranks broke and the troops fled in utter rout. This confusion soon spread to other detachments and the enemy fell back upon the village.

From the west, meanwhile, Colonel Gregory had been pushing his attack as Colonel Adams' columns advanced. Farther back, General Lawrence was hurrying supporting columns to the front. To the very streets of the village the Americans pursued the enemy, and then entered after them. From houses and from around corners the enemy fired upon the Yankee troops, who dashed forward with reckless courage.

Gradually, however, they retired from the village also, as their commanders realized that the American advance could not be stopped there.

At the very edge of the village Colonel Adams halted his men. On the western outskirts, Colonel Gregory did likewise. There they awaited orders before advancing farther.

Soon the orders came.

"Forward!" was the cry.

CHAPTER VII

IN A "BABY TANK"

So the American advance continued.

With the supporting columns of infantry that now came forward were several score of small armored tractors, commonly called "tanks." Because of the fact that these small machines, unlike their larger counterparts, were capable of holding only two men—a gunner and a pilot—they were called "two-men tanks," or more commonly, "baby tanks."

As an engine of warfare, the "tank," an American invention primarily, had made itself famous when General "Bingo" Byng led his British troops forward in the Cambrai battlefield, long before the United States entered the war. There were few tanks in the field in those days, but since their effectiveness was proven at Cambrai, thousands had been added to the Allied forces.

The "baby tanks" came later but proved quite as effective. They were able to penetrate places that were proof against their larger counter-parts, and now there was scarecly a division of British, French

or American troops in the field that did not have its tank corps.

As the foremost American troops, among which was Hal, now pursued the enemy, the American "baby tanks" came waddling forward, their guns belching fire as they advanced.

A short distance beyond Dun the German general staff, realizing that the Americans could not be stopped in the village, had hastily thrown up a wandering system of trenches, and to these the enemy now retired.

Immediately General Lawrence ordered a halt, that he might better bring his own lines into cohesion.

The American and German artillery, hastily rushed up, continued the struggle at long distance.

An hour later, Hal, returning toward his own place in the line, accompanied by the marine who had killed the German machine gunner, came abreast of a "baby tank." The tank appeared perfectly intact, but the lad knew at a glance that there was no crew within.

"I wonder why?" he muttered, and stopped to investigate.

The small door that served as an entrance was open. Hal peered in. The marine who was with him also stopped.

"Where's the crew, sir?" he asked.

"You know as much about them as I do," was Hal's reply.

"Maybe they've gone after 'gas,'" said the marine.

Hal climbed in and examined the petrol reservoir.

"Plenty of gas," he said.

He examined the other mechanism carefully.

"Nothing wrong so far as I can see," he declared. "However, it's none of our business. We'll be moving on."

But at that moment came from General Lawrence's portion of the field the call for a general advance. Hal glanced around quickly. He was still some distance from his own post, and he saw his men start forward under command of Lieutenant Edgerton. It was unlikely that he would be able to overtake them. He turned to the marine.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Bowers, sir."

"All right, Bowers. Do you know anything about these tanks?"

"Not much, sir. I can drive an automobile or an airplane, and I've watched these things work. Guess I could run one if I had to."

"Well, you can work the gun, can't you?" Hal wanted to know.

"You bet I can, sir, and I'll guarantee not to miss very often. Are you thinking of boarding this craft, sir?"

"I am," said Hal. "We seem to be out of the

fight right now. It's up to us to get into it again. Climb in, man."

Bowers boarded the tank with alacrity and deposited himself beside the single machine gun. Hal perched himself in the pilot's seat and opened the throttle. The tank moved forward.

In the distance, both to right and left, Hal saw other tanks waddling forward. They were all still too far from the enemy to do any great damage, but they were ambling forward as swiftly as their peculiar construction would permit, all anxious to approach within striking distance.

In front, the American infantry, with absolute disregard for the German artillery bombardment, dashed for the enemy trenches. They climbed in, and even from where Hal was the lad could see the signs of terrible combat within.

But the American charge had not been made in sufficient force. True, the Germans were driven from their improvised trenches, but the Yankee forces at the extreme front were numerically too small to pursue their advantage. They waited quietly for the arrival of reinforcements.

Straight into the erstwhile trenches the tank driven by Hal now nosed its way. Its appearance was received with cheers by the men. Then it waddled crazily forward in pursuit of the foe.

Hal was not given to unnecessary recklessness, and the fact that he advanced now while the bulk

of the American troops remained beyond was not due to any spirit of foolishness. In passing, Hal was not aware of the fact that the most advanced troops were awaiting reinforcements. He thought that they would continue the pursuit at once. Therefore, in spite of the cries to stop that were raised behind, the tank ambled on.

Then, so suddenly that it seemed that a curtain of blackness had been thrown about them, a fog descended over the field.

In the advance of the tank, the German artillery and machine guns had been busy. A mine or two had exploded near the machine. Hal had been struck in the left hand by a tiny bit of shrapnel that found its way through one of the loopholes, but so slightly that the skin had only been bruised.

Hal put the snout of the tank over the edge of a hill in the fog, but stopped in time to keep from end-over-ending down. Then he felt his way carefully down hill by a roundabout road.

In the valley beyond there were machine gun nests and one seventy-seven field piece and some wandering trenches. In the hillside overhead were scores of burrow-like dugouts in which Germans had fortified themselves.

In this direction Hal still guided his tank, confident that the American forces also were advancing under cover of the fog.

Among the thousand shattering noises of battle,

the approach of the tank had not been noticed. Suddenly the fog lifted, and for the first time Hal was conscious of the fact that his baby tank was unsupported by other tanks, or infantry, although the big American guns still sounded from behind. Nevertheless, Hal knew that the American advance was likely to be resumed at any minute.

In spite of the lifting of the fog, the approach of the tank was still unperceived by the enemy. It is a constant source of wonder to tank crews that this happens so often. Locked up in their steel chamber and with a hammering gun they feel their roaring progress must herald them afar. Yet it often happens that they creep upon the enemy as though their beast had been shod with velvet.

Hal saw the flare of the "77" and headed toward it. Bowers turned a stream of fire on it and the gun went out of action.

The tank lurched on toward a long windrow of rusted wire. The wire shone red in the sun that had come out to dispel the fog. In successive alterations of the defense, it had been made into a pile fifty feet long, by twenty broad, and four feet high.

"Looks like a machine-gun nest to me!" called Bowers.

But Hal still guided the machine toward the spot.

Suddenly a veritable hail of bullets poured upon the tank and rattled harmlessly off the steel sides.

Hal stopped the tank.

"You're right," he called to Bowers. "It's a nest, all right."

For the next ten minutes, as Hal expressed it later, "we just sat there and took it."

An anti-tank rifle was brought into play by the Germans. This weapon was a monster indeed, fully seven feet long and forty pounds in weight—not, perhaps, a monster as compared with heavy seige guns and heavy artillery, but a mammoth for an anti-tank gun. But the anti-tank's rifle bullets likewise failed to pierce the living-room of the tank, although they did cut through the running gear in one or two spots that were not vital.

Hal and Bowers ducked down so that they would not be struck by slivers should they come through the eye-slits in the tank.

"We're in a tight place, sir," called Bowers.

"Right," Hal agreed. "We don't want to take too many chances peeking through the eye-holes while those bullets are hitting around us like this. Great Scott! Listen! It sounds like someone was hitting the skin with a sledge hammer at the rate of fifty blows a second."

A sliver suddenly spun through a porthole and struck Bowers on the hand. The wound was slight but painful. Bowers wrung his numbed hand in silence.

"Hurt much?" asked Hal.

"No, sir. I'll be all right in a second."

But the hand wasn't all right in a second. It was still too numb to permit of handling the gun.

"There isn't any use of our being here unless we can do some good," Hal called. "I'm afraid you can't work that gun any longer, Bowers."

"I can drive," was Bowers' reply.

So the two changed places, Hal going into the gunner's turret.

This to Hal was one of the worst moments of the battle, for tankers fit as closely into tanks as snails in their shells. It was with an effort that Hal and Bowers crawled past each other, for there were several painful moments when two bodies occupied the space that was a tight fit for one. But they managed it.

Bowers waggled the tank out into the open and headed for the nest of annoying gunners, and Hal will always have respect for these gunners.

In spite of their failure against the tank, the Prussians died with their hands on their guns. Others ran away and the tank was checked in its progress, while Hal poured volley after volley at the fleeing foes.

Suddenly Hal was arrested by a shout from Bowers.

"Hey! What's that?" cried the marine.

Looking a trifle to the left, Hal saw four Germans wearing Red Cross uniforms, carrying something on a litter.

"That's a mighty funny-looking stretcher," said Bowers. "Have a shot at it."

"Not a chance," replied Hal. "They're Red Cross workers."

"That's a funny-looking litter," said Bowers, unconvinced. "Take my advice and shoot."

Then, suddenly, without further words, Hal turned his gun on the four men, in spite of their Red Cross uniforms, and fired.

"And just in time!" muttered Bowers to himself.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

The queer-looking litter, as Bowers termed it, came suddenly to life.

The quartet of Germans tumbled in a sprawling, jerking heap. One sprang in the air, raising and overturning the litter as he did so. The gray blanket which had covered it fell off and Bowers' suspicions were confirmed. It was a machine gun the "Red Cross" counterfeits had been carrying away.

"Good job there, sir," Bowers called to Hal.

The lad nodded grimly to himself.

"So that's the way they play the game, eh?" he said. "Well, I'll be prepared for them when they try another trick like that."

The tank jangled on.

Out of a hole in the ground, partially hidden by a tangle of old wire, suddenly popped a German boy in soldier's uniform. His appearance was so unexpected that Bowers stopped the tank abruptly.

The German's hands were raised high in the air.

"Kamerad!" he cried. "Kamerad!"

He was so near the tank that Hal could see the tears streaming down his cheeks.

"I haven't got the heart to shoot him," Bowers called to Hal. "Climb out, sir, and see what he has to say."

Hal knew as well as any soldier in the Allied armies that tanks, British, French or American, were not expected to make prisoners unless the infantry was in immediate support, and for this reason he understood what Bowers meant when the marine said he couldn't shoot the German boy down in cold blood.

The reason may be readily understood, for the crew of a baby tank is composed of only two men. Only now and then is it possible to shepherd prisoners ahead of a tank and it is always bad practice for either of the crew to leave his steel fortalice. In this case, however, Hal took into consideration the youth of the prisoner.

"Better be careful, sir," Bowers called as Hal opened the door and crawled out. "Remember the Boche who called 'Kamerad' to me awhile back."

"But this is only a boy," replied Hal, "and he's crying at that."

"Can't help that, sir. They're all bad actors and none is to be trusted."

"I guess I'm safe enough," declared Hal, as he advanced.

"Got your gun?" called Bowers.

Hal shook his head.

"I don't need any gun for this Boche," said he.

"Maybe not," grumbled Bowers to himself, "but I guess I'll just crawl out after you."

As Hal approached the boy, the German's face changed. He saw that Hal was unarmed, while at his side hung a handsome Luger pistol. He stopped his cry of "Kamerad" and began jerking at the fastenings of his weapon. The flap of the American holster fastens with a leather button, which facilitates hasty action, while the German holster is buckled down.

Before the German could get the buckle unloosed, Hal had him by the throat. The German fought in despairing silence now, one hand plucking at the fingers that were choking him and the other still fumbling with the gun. At this juncture Bowers, also unarmed, closed in.

In spite of his youth, the German was of powerful build and he struggled so furiously that for a moment Hal and Bowers were unable to quiet him. In the struggle, Bowers caught sight of a long, thin stiletto which the German wore at his left side. His right hand shot out and clasped the handle. The weapon flashed aloft.

"Hold on!" cried Hal. "He's only a kid!"

Bowers caught himself just in time. With a mumbled imprecation, he cast the stiletto away from him.

"Good thing you yelled," he said to himself.

Hal had now possessed himself of both the German's hands and his adversary was unable to fight further. Nevertheless, the struggle would have been at a deadlock had it not been for Bowers, who now approached and relieved the German of his pistol.

"All right, you can let him go now, sir," the marine said.

Hal released his hold and stepped back, at the same time covering the German with the Luger.

"Sit down," said Bowers.

It is doubtful if the young German understood Bowers' words, but he certainly caught their import, for he sat down in front of the tank.

Bowers turned to Hal.

"You see, they're all alike, sir," he said. "They're not to be trusted."

"So I see," said Hal. "Well, I won't be caught napping again. And this is the second one that has tried that 'Kamerad' trick on us in the same day."

"Almost within the same hour, you might say," replied Bowers. "But what are we going to do with him?"

"That's a hard question," was Hal's reply. "We can't make him prisoner and I'm not disposed to let him go scott-free in view of his actions. Guess we might as well tie him up and leave him here."

"Suits me, sir."

A few moments later the German was lying on

the ground, his hands bound with portions of his own clothing.

"Guess he won't bother about yelling 'Kamerad' again," said Hal.

"Well, we're all here," said Bowers with a smile. "So where do we go from here, sir?"

At that moment, far back, came the crash of infantry fire. Turning, Hal and Bowers perceived the foremost line of advancing Americans in the distance.

"Wow!" cried Bowers, and his trench helmet went sailing high in the air. "Here they come, sir. Don't they look fine?"

"You bet they do, Bowers," Hal shouted, carried away by his own enthusiasm.

Indeed, it was an inspiring sight, the long line of khaki-clad figures which came sweeping forward at a slow run.

"They'll come up to us presently. All we have to do is wait," said Hal.

The long line came directly toward them. At the pace they were advancing they would reach Hal, Bowers and their tank in fifteen minutes. But suddenly the formation of the charging troops changed.

"Hey!" cried Bowers. "They're not coming this way after all."

It appeared to be true.

Still quite a distance away, the American infantry had wheeled sharply to the right.

"Flank attack," said Hal briefly, "but it leaves us high and dry."

"Well," said Bowers, "I've heard that these contraptions," referring to the tank, "carry signal flags."

"We'll hoist one," said Hal briefly. "They may see it."

He climbed back into the tank, reappearing shortly with a small flag which he ran up on the turret.

"Now all we can do is sit down and wait."

"And pray that the Germans don't arrive in force first," Bowers added dryly.

The two sat down in the sunlight and followed the course of the battle in the distance. Gradually the American charge slowed down. From beyond, Hal could see the ranks of the gray-clad hosts as they emerged from the German lines farther back to charge the American infantry.

"They'll get all the fight they want," said Hal.

"And more," agreed Bowers.

Directly Hal caught the roar of wings coming toward them. He glanced aloft. An American liaison plane was approaching.

Bowers let out a cheer.

The aeroplane approached close enough to see the signal on the turret of the tank, and signalled back that reinforcements would be sent. Then it flew away again.

"In which case," said Hal, "we might as well get busy again."

"My sentiments, sir," agreed Bowers.

They re-entered the tank, leaving their prisoner still tied on the ground. The young German eyed them angrily as they disappeared within.

"Machine gun nest to the right, Bowers," called Hal, who again manned the gun.

Without further words, Bowers headed the tank in that direction.

"They're firing explosive bullets, sir," called Bowers coolly a few moments later as the earth flew high to one side of the tank.

Previous to this, the use of explosive bullets against tanks had been questioned, but Hal was bound to believe the evidence of his own eyes. In the instance where the use of explosive bullets had been reported before, they had been effective in that they had set fire to gasoline in the travel tanks lashed to the machine's sides. Hal, recalling the details of that battle, was thankful that there were no tanks of gasoline lashed to the tank in which he and Bowers were confined.

Now, it seemed to Hal and Bowers, they were in the center of a group of machine-gun nests. Hal fired as rapidly as he could bring his gun to bear.

But the Germans had developed wisdom. The machine gunners crouched down in their holes whenever the tanks were turned on them, and let

gunners in other nests take up the fight. A surprising number of machine guns were developed around the tank. Evidently the gunners had kept under cover during the previous activities of the tank and only popped up when it seemed safe.

It began to grow uncomfortably hot in the tank. The backplace which separated the engine compartment from the turret and steering room became almost red hot.

Hal's eyes grew dim as he tried to bring the tank's gun to bear on the enemy. He felt his senses leaving him, and his clothes began to scorch.

"Let's go," he called to Bowers. "I'm through."

They jerked open the little door in the tank nose through which men rise in jack-in-the-box fashion and hurled themselves out. They struck the ground upon all fours, but picked themselves up and ran.

Through all the noise of battle that now was drawing closer to them they heard the machine-gun bullets twanging above their heads. In the distance was a bit of ruined wall. Directly they gained its shelter. Before leaving the tank they had seized their revolvers. These they now carried in their hands. The German infantry bore down on them.

"We're in a bad way, Bowers," said Hal quietly. "What shall we do?"

Bowers tapped his revolver, affectionately it seemed to Hal.

"We've got our gats!" he said.

CHAPTER IX

CHESTER TO THE RESCUE

DESPITE himself, Hal was forced to smile.

"'Gats?'" he repeated.

"Well, that's what we call 'em on the East Side in good old New York," replied Bowers, also smiling. "But you can call 'em anything you want to. We ought to be good for a couple of Huns apiece before we go down."

"They'll know we're here, at all events," declared Hal grimly.

As the Germans bore down on them from the east, Hal glanced quickly over his shoulder and uttered a cry of joy.

"Here come the Yanks!" he shouted.

It was true. Half a mile behind them a long line of the boys in khaki advanced at the double, spread out in the battle formation which had its origination in the great war. Behind the first line came a second and then a third.

Hal estimated the distance with a practiced eye.

"Half a mile," he said.

"Right," said Bowers, "and the Germans are a quarter of a mile closer—but still not close enough for my little gun here. But if there is going to be a race for us, I'll lay long odds on Fritz."

"Looks like you'd win," replied Hal. "There is the first messenger," he added quietly, as a German bullet struck the wall behind which the two had taken refuge.

Bowers peered over the top of the wall, raised his automatic and would have fired had Hal not stayed his hand.

"Don't waste your bullets," said the lad. "Remember the watchword of the battle of Bunker Hill: 'Wait until you see the whites of their eyes.' "

"Right," said Bowers briefly.

Came a volley of bullets from the foremost Germans as Hal and the marine crouched down behind their refuge. The bullets flattened themselves against the stout wall, but did no other damage.

"Pure waste of ammunition," was Hal's cool comment.

"What do the fools want to shoot for?" demanded Bowers. "All they have to do is rush us. We'll probably get a couple of them, but they are bound to get us in the end."

It appeared that the German officers had reached the same conclusion, for the rifle fire of the advancing infantry ceased and the Germans came on with fixed bayonets.

"Here's where the Marine Corps loses a private of the first class," said Bowers, with something like a grin, as he made sure that his automatic was ready for business.

"Looks like a certain lieutenant was going along with you," replied Hal, again glancing over his shoulder and calculating the distance to the approaching American forces. "Well, they've seen us anyhow," he added.

There came a shout of encouragement from the Yankee line and the troops appeared to redouble their speed.

"Help on the way, sir," said Bowers.

"And the Germans are here," rejoined Hal. "Don't waste a shot, Bowers."

"I wear a marksman's medal, sir," replied Bowers simply.

The Germans still came forward with a rush. Hal and Bowers stood to the wall, their revolvers poked slightly above and beyond it.

In this position, both were exposed to rifle fire from the enemy, but if they intended to fight back and not be caught like rats in a trap there was no help for it.

"Crack!"

Hal's revolver spoke first and a German toppled in his tracks.

Bowers' automatic belched forth a stream of fire as he swept the German line. At this distance, a

miss was practically impossible. Thus ten shots were hurled among the advancing foes and every bullet found its mark.

"Some shooting, Bowers," said Hal quietly, as he emptied his revolver into the very faces of the enemy.

There was no time to reload.

Hal clubbed his revolver in his right hand and waited. Bowers did likewise. Neither thought of surrender. In fact, so inhuman and barbarous had been the action of the Germans in the past that it was doubtful whether they would be spared should they raise their hands high in the air.

"Here they come!" cried Bowers.

The first German to poke his head around the wall from the left tumbled back again as the butt of Bowers' revolver crashed down on his skull.

Fortunately for the two, the granite wall, at the extreme right, touched a steep hill, thus preventing a surrounding movement by the enemy. Nevertheless, it was possible that the enemy might climb the hill and pick Hal and Bowers off with revolver or rifle at will. On the other hand, there was little likelihood that they would have time for such a maneuver before the American troops reached the spot. Besides the left flank, therefore, the only way the foe could reach the defenders was over the wall itself.

One German tried this. Climbing to the top of

the wall, he leaped down. As he struck the ground Hal's revolver crashed down on his head and he lay still.

A moment later two Germans leaped down together. The first Hal met with a blow to the head with his revolver, but before he could turn, the second man seized him in a powerful embrace. Hal kicked out with his left foot, which found the German's shin. At the same time the lad sent his left fist into the man's face. Down went the German.

Bowers, meanwhile, was equally hard pressed. Two men he disposed of with his revolver butt and his fists; then the enemy surrounded him. Hal, thinking to join forces with the marine, had moved backward as other enemies came over the wall and just before Bowers was hemmed in, the two managed to get back to back.

American arms flew about like flails and wherever a fist or a revolver butt landed, a German crashed to earth. Right and left Hal and Bowers struck out until their arms grew weary.

In the press of conflict, it seemed impossible that the two could remain on their feet. The struggle would have ended almost as soon as it began had one of the enemy been able to bring a revolver or rifle to bear, but so close were the struggling figures that the Germans could not fire without imminent risk of killing one of their own number.

So the struggle went on.

But an unequal combat such as this could have but one ending. Under the overwhelming numbers that closed in on them, Hal suddenly went down.

With a bellow like that of an enraged bull, Bowers moved back a trifle and stood squarely over the lad, one foot on each side of his prostrate form.

Two Germans jumped him from in front and two from behind. The first he sent staggering with a powerful blow from his right fist. The second he hurled from him with a kick; then turned on his heel to face the men behind. One of these threw his arms around Bowers' neck. Without a moment's hesitation, the marine buried his teeth in the man's hand and the strangle hold relaxed.

Whirling about, Bowers caught the fourth man in his arms, picked him up as though he had been a child and tossed him squarely in the faces of his comrades. Then, single-handed, he charged his foes.

Rifles were raised by the German soldiers and brought down sharply. Bowers reeled back, made an effort to retain his feet, and then sank to the ground unconscious.

Almost at the same moment, and as a German infantryman raised his bayonet to finish his work, a hail of rifle fire swept the Boche troops. Followed a loud Yankee cheer and the first American troops entered the conflict.

So intent had the enemy been on finishing Hal and Bowers, that they seem to have paid little attention

to the advancing American columns. It is probable that they had been ordered to finish the work in hand before worrying about the others and this had taken so long that they were caught in their own trap.

With cries of terror, the Germans gave ground.

But even as they turned to flee, the Americans were upon them with swords and bayonets. Foremost in the advancing columns, their swords throwing circles of steel about their heads and revolvers clasped in their left hands, belching fire, three officers dashed forward. Two were marines. The other wore the garb of the regular army. The first two were Lieutenants Smith and Jenkins; the third, Chester Crawford.

"Get 'em, Smith!" shouted Jenkins. "You may not get another chance."

Smith apparently needed no urging. He led his men on with wild cries. In the face of these charging demons the Germans, who at first had attempted to retire with some semblance of order, broke and fled in utter rout. With loud cheers, the boys from Yankeeland followed close on their heels.

Suddenly Lieutenant Smith, who was slightly ahead of Jenkins and Chester, halted. He had come upon the prostrate forms of Hal and Bowers.

"Hello!" he ejaculated, paying no heed to the confusion of battle. "A marine, and he is down. Fritz will have to pay for that."

He sprang forward again.

A moment later Chester came upon his fallen chum. There was fear in his heart as he bent over Hal, but this quickly fled as Hal drew a long breath.

Chester lifted Hal to his feet.

"Still alive, eh?" he said.

"Alive and kicking," replied Hal briefly. "Give me a gun or something."

"You'd better——" Chester began.

But Hal stooped quickly, picked up a fallen German's rifle and sprang forward. Chester darted after him.

Bowers, meanwhile, also had come to his senses and was endeavoring to get to his feet. A company of marines, moving rapidly forward, encircled him, steadied him and he also was given a rifle. The marines, closely followed by regular army troops, continued the pursuit.

Hal turned to Chester as they ran ahead, trying to catch up with the first-line troops, who by this time were some distance ahead.

"In the nick of time again, old man," he gasped.

"I was afraid I wouldn't be," was Chester's reply.

Ahead, the American advance suddenly slowed down. The reason was soon clear. German reinforcements had been rushed hurriedly forward, and the enemy was making a stand. But the Yankee halt was only momentary.

"Forward!" came the command.

CHAPTER X

THE ENEMY ROUTED

THE engagement into which American troops and American marines now entered bore more resemblance to old-time open fighting than anything Hal and Chester had seen in months.

A short distance ahead, the German line had halted and drawn up in close battle formation. Upon this human rock the Yankees hurled themselves with reckless abandon and wild cheers. One, two, three volleys they fired at the Germans as they charged and then they were upon the enemy with the bayonet.

The German line withstood the first onrush and the Americans were stopped. But in spite of their losses, they were not to be denied, and they dashed forward again.

By this time Hal and Chester had reached the ranks in front and pressed into the thick of the conflict. A few moments later Bowers ranged himself alongside of them. The lads greeted him with a nod; they had no time for words.

So close were the American soldiers together that for the space of a few moments it was impossible for them to wield their bayonets with the greatest effect. All they could do was to press ahead with the bayonets shoved out in front of them. But this condition was soon remedied. The men spread out fanwise, thus giving them better opportunity for using their weapons.

The clash of the bayonets could be heard above the roar of small arm fire and even above the cheering of the Yankees. For their part, the Germans fought silently and stubbornly.

Hal caught the point of a stabbing bayonet upon his own weapon and averted the thrust that otherwise must have pierced his throat. Before the German who had delivered it could recover his poise, Hal's bayonet had found its mark and the man fell to the ground to rise no more.

Chester, meanwhile, had accounted for two of the enemy and had not been touched himself. Bowers, once more in the heat of the conflict, was fighting like a superman, thrusting right and left with almost miraculous rapidity.

The German line wavered along its entire length. The Americans, unconsciously feeling that victory was within their grasp, pressed forward with even greater ferocity.

Suddenly, to Hal's right, fully fifty Germans threw down their guns as a single man, and, raising

their hands high above their heads, shouted "Kamerad" almost in unison.

Immediately these men were surrounded, their weapons collected and the Germans passed back to the rear ranks as prisoners. Following their action, other groups of Germans, separated from their comrades, followed the example of the first batch. For a moment it appeared as if the entire line in action would surrender.

Under harsh commands of their officers, however, the German line regained something of its cohesion and began a more orderly retreat.

Still the Americans pressed close on their heels. After a few moments of ineffectually attempting to hold back the Americans while retreating orderly, the German line broke again and the German soldiers fled.

It now became a case of each man for himself. With a cry to a score of troopers who had gathered about him, Hal dashed forward, thinking to take another batch of prisoners. But this particular group of the foes showed an unexpected burst of speed and the Americans were unable to overtake them.

From the distance, the German artillery again burst into action and shells fell dangerously close to Hal's little detachment. In front of him, Hal saw half a dozen of the enemy go down before the fire of their own guns.

Immediately the lad called a halt, and then led his men back to the supporting columns which had come to a pause. Farther back, the American artillery, which had been silent while the hand-to-hand struggle raged, became active again. The hour of infantry fighting had passed and the big guns took up the battle.

Hastily the Americans fell to work with intrenching tools to make secure their newly-won positions against a possible German attack. Only a thin line of skirmishers stood to their rifles to repel any attack that might develop while the digging in was in progress.

Hal found Chester with the marine, Bowers, a short distance back of the first line.

"Glad you're both safe," he said as he walked up to them. "Fortunately I was not even touched."

"Nor I," said Chester, "but our marine friend here didn't fare quite so well."

"That so?" said Hal, turning to Bowers. "Where are you wounded?"

"In the left shoulder," answered the marine, "but it's just a scratch."

"Nevertheless, you had better report and have it attended to at once," advised Hal. "Complications are likely to develop, you know, and we can't afford to lose a man unnecessarily."

"Very well, sir," said Bowers. "I shall heed your advice."

He saluted, turned on his heel and walked rapidly away.

"A good man, Chester," said Hal. "He and I went through rather a ticklish bit of work and he certainly upheld the traditions of the marines."

"That so?" said Chester. "How did you happen to get so well acquainted with him?"

In a few words Hal explained, and added:

"Now give me an account of your troubles since I saw you last."

"Well," said Chester with a laugh, "you seem to have had all the fun. In my case there isn't much to tell. I lost sight of you soon after the advance began and before long found myself in the midst of the fighting. I had a couple of narrow escapes in the course of the battle and I guess I got in a couple of good licks. Then, when we halted the first time, I hunted around for you, but you were missing. I was able to learn, however, that you had gone off on a little jaunt to put a certain machine gun out of action, but that's all I could learn. I began to fear you had been killed. But when we came in sight of two men holding that little wall in face of the entire German army, it seemed, I told myself, that it was you. Events have proved that I was right. Then I came on as fast as I could, Smith and Jenking with me. That's about all."

"Well," said Hal, "I've had about enough excitement for one day. I vote we report to General

Lawrence, who I see has moved his quarters close to the front. After that, unless there is work in store for us, I am in favor of finding a place to take a little nap."

"Suits me," agreed Chester. "Come on."

But, as it developed, there was to be no sleep for either Hal or Chester for hours to come.

General Lawrence received the reports of the two lads in silence and for some moments seemed wrapped in thought. At last he said:

"You have done very well, young men. You will not think I am imposing upon you when I ask whether you are willing to take despatches for me to General Pershing?"

"Not at all, sir," said Hal. "We shall be very glad."

General Lawrence took a sheaf of papers from his pocket and passed them to Hal.

"These must be delivered to General Pershing with all possible haste," he said. "In a high-powered automobile, you should be able to reach his quarters soon after dark. It is probable that you will be ordered back here at once."

He indicated that the interview was at an end. Hal and Chester saluted and took their departure.

Ten minutes later they were speeding westward in a big army automobile, Hal himself at the wheel.

"If you ask me, Chester," said Hal as they sped along, "these marines, from what I have seen of

them, are going to prove among the most effective units in Uncle Sam's army."

"What makes you think so?" demanded Chester.

"Well, take this man Bowers for example. Of course, he's a powerful man, but it's his spirit that counts—he's afraid of nothing. He's perfectly cool under fire and when it comes to hand-to-hand fighting I doubt if there's a man in the German army who could stand up against him."

"He's only one," said Chester.

"That's true enough. But look at the rest of them—rough and ready every one. Hard men they are. Most of them look as though they had come off the Bowery in New York, or were prize fighters, or gun-men. They are bound to give a good account of themselves in a fight. Hardly a marine who doesn't look as though he had been brought up to fight."

"I guess most of them have," replied Chester dryly. "They gave a good account of themselves to-day, as far as that goes."

"So they did," agreed Hal, "but their numbers were comparatively small. Take a couple of divisions now, and I'll venture that they could drive back twice their number."

"That's a pretty fair-sized order, Hal."

"So it is, but that's just what I think."

"Well, I hope you're right. We'll have need of

men like that. But look! we seem to be coming to some place."

"We'll stop and make sure of our bearings," said Hal, and brought the car to a stop before a group of French soldiers.

For the benefit of the reader, it may be said that up to this time, the American troops had not been acting independently of their British and French allies. Up to this time there was no distinct American army in the field. American troops had been brigaded with French and British divisions for seasoning purposes, for the Allied staff could not understand how raw troops could possibly hold their own against the Germans without having been put through a rigorous course of training with veteran troops.

And yet British and French alike soon were to learn the true mettle of American troops, whether fully trained or not. They were to learn that wherever an American soldier was ordered he went, or died in the effort.

The date was not now far distant when this was to be brought home to the British and French in a manner they will never forget and, as it developed, it was the American marines who were to prove it; for at the battle of Chateau Thierry the American marine was to prove that as a fighting man there does not live his equal.

From a French officer, Hal gained needed direc-

tions and the big army auto continued its journey. Darkness fell and they still sped on. At eight o'clock Hal stopped the machine in the center of a big army camp and stepped out. He made his way to General Pershing's quarters. Chester went with him.

CHAPTER XI

A FRIEND IN NEED

"HELP! Help!"

A voice, strangely familiar to Hal and Chester, floated into the American trenches from the darkness of No Man's Land beyond.

"Hello," said Captain O'Neil, "somebody left out there, eh? Well, I guess he'll have to make the best of it for the night. Fritz is in an ugly humor this evening. No use stirring him up. We're pretty comfortable here for a change."

"Seems pretty tough to leave him out there though, sir," Chester ventured.

"So it does. Still when he came into this war he must have known it wasn't a game of tiddlewinks. He'll have to take his chances same as the rest of us. Anyhow, he's probably in a shell hole and should be safe enough. But I thought all our men returned safely after the raid."

"I thought so, too, sir," said Hal. "There wasn't a man reported missing."

"Probably a straggler from another brigade, sir," said Chester.

"Most likely," rejoined Captain O'Neil. "We'll see what can be done for him in the morning."

He strode away.

It was two days after Hal and Chester had delivered General Lawrence's despatches to General Pershing. Contrary to their expectations, they had not been ordered to return again to General Lawrence's command, but had been returned to their own division, which at that time chanced to be guarding front-line trenches in the Soissons region only a short distance south of the Marne. Arrived, they had reported at once to Captain O'Neil and had been assigned new quarters.

To-night they were keeping watch. Early in the evening they had accompanied a party of troops in a raid on a certain point in one of the German trenches. Several prisoners had been made and the Americans had not lost a man. It was no wonder, then, that they should be surprised at the voice which called from No Man's Land.

The voice came again:

"Help! Help!"

"By Jove, Hal!" said Chester, "there is something familiar about that voice. Wonder who it can be?"

Hal shrugged his shoulders, a habit occasioned by long association with French troops.

"Don't know," was his reply; "but I'll admit I

seem to have heard it before. We'll see when daylight comes."

At that moment a private by the name of McHugh began to sing.

"Where do we go from here, boys, where do we go from here?" were the words of the song that broke the uncanny stillness of the trenches. It was the song that had come into fame after the American troops reached the battlefields of France—the song to which American regiments marched into battle.

Other voices took up the song.

Came a hail in broken English from the German trenches scarce a hundred yards away.

"Hey there, Yanks!"

Instantly the singing in the American trenches came to a stop.

"What do you want, Fritz?" Hal called back.

"Don't make so much noise, all you fellows, and let the boy sing."

The boy, Chester took it, was McHugh. He could not have been more than twenty.

"He has a grand voice," the German continued. "If he will sing us a song we will let the man in the shell hole oud there go back."

At the same time the voice from No Man's Land cried a third time:

"Help! Help!"

Chester took counsel with Hal.

"Well," he said, "shall we take Fritz at his word?"

It should be explained here that incidents such as this were not uncommon in the trenches where friend and foe were so close together. More than once British and American soldiers had shared their tobacco and other luxuries with the less fortunate Germans. Sometimes, conversations like this were carried on for hours at a time.

"Trouble is," Hal answered Chester, "you can't trust them. It's likely to be a ruse to get the man into the open so they can take a shot at him."

"And it may be they're acting in good faith this time."

"Oh, it may be, of course." Hal turned to the private. "What do you say, McHugh, will you sing for Fritz?"

"Well," said McHugh, "I didn't enlist to come over here and entertain the Boche, but if it'll do that chap out there any good, why count me in."

"Very good," said Hal. He raised his voice. "Still there, Fritz?"

"Yah! What have you decided?"

"He'll sing for you. But we'll hold you to your word."

"Good," said the German. "Let him stand up on the top of the trench so we can see."

"Oh, no you don't, Fritz," Hal shouted back. "We're on to your tricks."

"But it is no trick," the German protested. "We give our words."

"Your word is not always to be trusted, Fritz."

"But me," said the voice. "I am Hans Loeder, who sang on the American stage. I give the word of an artist."

"By Jove, sir!" ejaculated McHugh at this juncture. "I know him well. In Chicago I once took lessons from him."

"So?" exclaimed Hal in surprise. "Then maybe you would wish to talk to him. But remember he is a German, after all, and be careful."

"Hello there, professor!" called McHugh. "Don't you remember me?"

"Vat?" came the reply. "Can it be my old pupil Daniel McHugh?"

"The same, professor," McHugh shouted back.

"No wonder I recognize the voice," came the response. "Did I not say always that you had talent? And now you will sing for us, eh?"

"Sure," said McHugh. "I'll take your word, professor."

Without further words, the young soldier sprang to the top of the trench.

"Well," said Hal, "if you're going up, so am I."

He sprang up also, and Chester followed suit. A moment later fully a hundred American heads appeared over the top of the trenches. Beyond, in the darkness, German heads also bobbed up.

"Now professor," said McHugh, "what shall it be?"

"Someding lively," was the reply. "Someding to make us forget why we are here."

"The Darktown Colored Ball," suggested McHugh.

"Yah!" came the cry from the German lines. "Dat is id. Someding with the swing."

So McHugh sang. And when he concluded, a hail of applause came from the enemy lines. The American troops also applauded and cheered. Two more popular songs McHugh sang and then, when the applause had died down, he called out:

"That's all for to-night, professor. More some other time."

"Good," was the shouted reply. "Now I keep my word. Tell your friend oud there he may return without fear."

"Come on in, you out there," cried one of the Yankee soldiers.

"Oh, no," the man in the shell hole shouted back. "They just want to get me out there for a little target practice."

"Rats!" shouted McHugh. "Crawl out of there and come in like a man. We're here to protect you if we have to."

"You haven't done much of a job of it so far," said the voice from No Man's Land.

A German voice broke in.

"You can have but ten minutes," it said. "After that you must take your chances."

"Fair enough, Fritz," called an American. "Hey! You in the shell hole, come on in here."

"It's safer here," was the reply.

Again a German voice interrupted.

"If the Yank is afraid," it said, "we will allow two of your number to go and get him."

Half a dozen men would have leaped from the trench had Hal not stayed them.

"You stay here and cover us," he said. "Lieutenant Crawford and I will go. At the first sign of treachery, fire without hesitation."

"Very well, sir," said Private McHugh.

Hal and Chester leaped down and advanced into the darkness of No Man's Land.

"No use coming after me now," cried the voice in the shell hole. "I know when I'm well off. I don't want to be shot in the back."

Hal started.

"Great Scott, Chester!" he cried. "Haven't you recognized that voice yet?"

"No," returned Chester in some surprise. "Have you?"

"Rather," said Hal dryly. "It's Stubbs."

Chester clapped a hand on his leg.

"By all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Now why couldn't I place that voice?"

The lads increased their pace and at length they

came to the shell crater where the lone American had taken shelter from the German fire.

"Come on out of there," said Hal, disguising his voice.

"Not much," said the man inside.

"Don't be a fool, man," said Chester angrily. "We've only a few moments' grace. Hurry, now!"

"Say," came the voice from the darkness, "why are you fellows bent on getting me killed? I haven't done anything to you."

"We'll have to hurry, Hal," said Chester. "Let's go down and get him."

The two lads leaped into the shell crater and laid rough hands upon the occupant, who squirmed and struggled in vain.

"Let me go," he cried angrily, and struck out right and left.

"Listen, Stubbs," said Hal. "If you don't come out of here right now I'll have to tap you over the head with my revolver."

The struggles of the man in the shell hole ceased. He almost moaned.

"Hal!" he gasped, and muttered to himself. "Anthony, you certainly are out of luck. Something always happens. And I suppose Chester is here, too, eh?"

"Right," said Chester.

"Poor Stubbs," said the occupant of the hole. "You're a dead man!"

CHAPTER XII

STUBBS EXPLAINS

"Come along, Stubbs," said Chester. "Time is growing short. Fritz is likely to open fire most any minute."

"And the first shot is sure to hit me," said Stubbs. "Well, I can run if I have to."

He sprang out of the shell crater as he spoke and made for the American lines at full speed.

"Guess we might as well do a little sprint ourselves," said Hal.

The two lads dashed after Stubbs.

Stubbs was surrounded by a crowd of soldiers when Hal and Chester clambered into the trenches. There was amazement on the faces of most of the men at the fact that a man should appear from No Man's Land and not be attired in uniform; for Stubbs wore only a plain khaki suit, cut after the fashion of military garments, it is true, but still plainly not a uniform.

"Glad to see you boys again," said Stubbs, as Hal

and Chester walked up to him. "Where've you been all these days?"

"Fighting," said Chester, "which is more than you can say, Mr. Stubbs."

"That so?" said Stubbs in a huff. "Maybe you think I was out in No Man's Land there for my health, eh?"

"Well, hardly," Hal broke in, "but I'll wager you didn't go out there to have a shot at a Boche."

"Come, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "tell us just why you were in that shell hole."

"I was in that hole," said Stubbs, "because the managing editor of the New York *Gazette* said he wanted a good descriptive story of a battle. I figured that a shell hole was as good a place as any to see what was going on."

"Still a newspaper man, then, Stubbs?" said Hal.

"You bet."

"I thought you had gone out of that business," said Chester. "I remember finding you in Berlin once on a mission that had nothing to do with a newspaper."

"Oh, well, a fellow likes to help out once in a while," rejoined Stubbs modestly.

"Then why don't you shoulder a gun, Stubbs?" demanded Hal.

"Look here," said Stubbs angrily. "I'm getting good and tired of having you fellows pick on me all the time. I haven't joined out because, in the first

place, I'm no fighter. I'm of a great deal more value in this war in my present capacity. There are enough young men to do the fighting. I'm trying to keep the folks back home in touch with what you're doing. And you can believe me or not, they are glad to be kept in touch."

"I've no doubt of it, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal with a smile. "Never mind, we won't pester you any more for a while."

"For a while, eh?" said Stubbs, grinning. "I didn't think you could mean permanently."

At that moment Captain O'Neil approached. Hal and Chester saluted and stood at attention.

"You had better turn in, lieutenants," said the captain. He eyed Stubbs closely. "What's this man doing here?" he wanted to know.

"War correspondent, sir," replied Hal, and introduced Stubbs.

"You have no business at the front, Mr. Stubbs," said Captain O'Neil. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave. Not that I am afraid you'll let loose any military secrets—the censor will see to that when you file your dispatches—but it's against orders, you know."

"Maybe so," said Stubbs, "but somebody has to tell the people at home what is going on over here."

"The proper authorities will see to that, sir."

"Well," said Stubbs, "in my mind the newspapers are the proper authorities in this case. They

know how to tell the people so they will understand."

"I don't wish to quarrel with you, sir," said Captain O'Neil sharply.

"Nor I," said Stubbs. "I'm not a fighting man, captain."

"Then, sir, you must leave at once or I shall be forced to place you under arrest."

"Oh, no you won't," said Stubbs grimly. "Hold on," he cried, as Captain O'Neil took a step forward. "No offense, captain. Just have a look at this paper."

He produced a document from his pocket and passed it to the captain. Captain O'Neil read it quickly and then passed it back.

"Why didn't you say in the first place that you had a pass from the commander-in-chief?"

"You didn't give me time, captain."

Captain O'Neil turned to Hal and Chester.

"You may care for the company of war correspondents," he said with some heat. "Every man to his choice. But I don't."

He turned on his heel and strode away.

"There, Stubbs," said Chester. "You've made him mad."

"Well, I can't help it because he is so touchy, can I?" asked Stubbs.

"Perhaps not. But there was no need to offend him."

"Most of these officers are a trifle too cocky," declared Stubbs. I thought I'd take him down a peg."

"Don't forget, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, taking a step forward, "that I'm an officer, too. I can have you placed under arrest, you know."

"You won't, though," said Stubbs.

"Won't I?" said Chester. "Why won't I?"

"In the first place," said Stubbs, "because you are too glad to see me again. And in the second place, because I've got something to tell you."

"Out with it then, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal.

"Wait a minute, now, just wait a minute," said Stubbs. "Take me to your quarters where we can be quiet. You'll have to put me up for the night, anyhow, and we might as well be comfortable while we chat."

The three made their way to the lads' quarters. Stubbs sat down on the edge of Hal's bunk and produced a pipe.

"Learned to smoke yet?" he asked of the boys.

"Not yet, Stubbs," said Hal, "and I guess we never will."

"Take my advice and learn," said Stubbs. "It's a great comfort to a man sometimes."

"Perhaps," said Chester. "But it's a habit too easily cultivated and too hard to stop. I'm satisfied without tobacco."

"Every man to his taste, as Captain O'Neil says," commented Stubbs with a laugh.

"Come, Stubbs," said Hal. "You said you had something to tell us. Out with it."

Stubbs puffed away for some moments in silence and it was plain to Hal and Chester that he was thinking deeply.

"I suppose I really should say nothing," said Stubbs, "but I know that I can depend on you boys to repeat nothing I say. Besides, I've simply got to express my feelings to someone."

"If it's only an expression of feeling, maybe it isn't so important after all, Stubbs," remarked Chester.

"Well," said Stubbs, "the thing that I mean is this. I am willing to bet anything I ever expect to have that what I have learned in the last few days is going to result in an Allied offensive that will put an end to this war."

Hal and Chester sprang to their feet.

"You're sure, Stubbs?" demanded Chester.

"I'm sure enough in my own mind," declared the war correspondent, waving the lads back to their seats. "Of course, it is always possible that things won't work out the way I figure; but knowing the caliber of a certain man in Uncle Sam's expeditionary forces I figure that they will work out."

"Explain, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal.

"Has it ever struck either of you," said Stubbs slowly, between puffs at his pipe, "that it's all foolishness for the Allies to remain snug and wait until

the enemy does the attacking? I mean, haven't you thought that perhaps more could be accomplished if the Allies carried the fighting to the foe?"

Hal nodded.

"It has," he said.

"Well, the same thought has struck some one else," declared Stubbs.

"You mean——" began Chester.

"Exactly," said Stubbs. "I mean General Pershing, unless I have been grossly misinformed."

"You mean that General Pershing will order an American advance?" exclaimed Chester.

"No, no. He can't do that. Marshal Foch is commander-in-chief of the Allied forces and it's up to him to decide. What I mean is that General Pershing is not altogether pleased with the progress of events. I am informed that he believes a grand offensive on all fronts would do more toward ending the war right now than any other one thing."

"Well, why doesn't he tell Marshal Foch so?" demanded Chester.

"That," said Stubbs quietly, "is what I am informed he intends to do."

"Hurray!" shouted Hal.

"Quiet," said Stubbs sharply. "Not a word of what I have told you must be repeated. "It doesn't make any difference how I know all this. It's sufficient that I do know it. However, things may not work out as I expect. It is possible that General

Pershing's advice may not prevail. He may be overruled by Marshal Foch and General Haig at their conference Thursday."

"So there is going to be a conference, eh?" said Hal.

"Yes. As I say, the conference is to be held Thursday, day after to-morrow. It will be held in Marshal Foch's headquarters. It may result in developments and it may not. At all events, I am quite certain that General Pershing will go to the conference prepared to urge an immediate advance."

"By Jove! That sounds awfully good to me!" declared Chester.

"And to me," agreed Hal. "I'd like to be present at that conference."

"We'd all like to be there," said Stubbs dryly. "But there's not a chance. Not a chance."

But, as it developed, there was a chance; not a chance for Stubbs, war correspondent, perhaps, but more than a chance for Hal and Chester.

It was pure accident that gave them this opportunity.

CHAPTER XIII

A PIECE OF LUCK

Eight o'clock Thursday morning found Hal and Chester, in a large army automobile, returning from the quarters of General Lawrence, where they had been sent by General Allen, who commanded the division in which the boys served.

As they rode along, Hal, turning a sharp curve, applied the emergency brakes and brought the car to a stop only a few feet from a second machine, which appeared to be stalled in the middle of the road.

There were only two figures in the second automobile, and as Hal looked quickly at the man in the tonneau he jumped to the ground and came to attention. Chester, with a quick look at one of the occupants of the car, did likewise.

Both lads had recognized General Pershing.

General Pershing returned the salutes and spoke sharply.

"You drive somewhat recklessly, sirs," he said.

"Had you not been prompt in applying your brakes you would have run us down."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Hal.

"It can't be helped now," said General Pershing, "and it is good fortune that brings you here now. My own car has run out of 'gas,' due to the carelessness of my driver. I have sent him for another car, but now that you are here I shall change. Come, Colonel Gibson."

The American general and his companion alighted and took seats in Hal's car. General Pershing motioned Hal to the wheel and Chester was also waved into a front seat.

"You will drive me to General Lawrence's quarters," said General Pershing, "and this will give you an opportunity to do all the speeding you care to. I must see General Lawrence and be back at my own headquarters by noon."

"Very well, sir," said Hal.

He turned the car quickly and soon was speeding in the direction from which he had come.

Neither Hal nor Chester said a word as the car sped on. The trip to General Lawrence's quarters was made in record time, and Hal and Chester remained in the car while the two generals talked alone.

Half an hour later General Pershing, still accompanied by Colonel Gibson, re-entered the automobile.

"You know where my temporary quarters are in the city of Soissons?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Hal.

General Pershing leaned forward in the car and gazed at the two lads closely.

"Surely I know you two officers," he said. "Your faces are very familiar."

"Yes, sir," said Hal. "We had the pleasure of going to Berlin for you, sir."

General Pershing clapped his hands.

"I know you now," he said. "Colonel, these are the young officers who went to Berlin and brought back the list of German spies in America."

"That so, sir?" said Colonel Gibson. "Seems to me they are very young to have been entrusted with such a task."

"Young they are in years," said the American commander-in-chief, "but they are older than a good many of us in experience, so far as this war is concerned. If my memory serves me right, I believe they put in several years with the French and British before the United States entered the conflict. Am I right?" he asked of Hal.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, sir," said General Pershing, "you will make all haste toward my headquarters."

Hal sent the car forward with a lurch and in a moment they were speeding toward Soissons at a rate of speed close to sixty miles an hour.

From time to time, they passed a car going in the opposite direction, and several times going around curves they seemed in imminent danger of running into another machine. But Hal was a careful, though swift, driver, and his hands were perfectly steady on the wheel.

They flashed through several little villages so fast that the natives stared in open-mouthed wonder.

Hal's sense of direction stood him in good stead, and he did not find it necessary to stop once and ask directions. He had been over the road many times before and he swerved from road to road with unerring certainty.

In the rear seat, General Pershing and Colonel Gibson talked guardedly and neither Hal nor Chester could understand what they said had they wished to eavesdrop. But such was not their intention. Both lads were highly elated at their good fortune, for both realized perfectly that it was no small honor to drive and ride in the car occupied by the commander-in-chief of all the American forces in France.

Two hours passed and Hal began to recognize the familiar landmarks of the city of Soissons. He breathed a sigh of relief, for while he was confident in his own mind that he had kept to the right road, there was always the possibility that he might mistake it.

He slowed the car down a trifle.

"We should reach your headquarters in fifteen minutes, sir," he called to General Pershing over his shoulder.

The American commander made no reply, but Hal had expected none.

It was less than fifteen minutes later that Hal drew the automobile to a stop before the handsome villa that General Pershing occupied as his headquarters.

"A fine piece of driving, lieutenant," said General Pershing to Hal, as he alighted, followed by Colonel Gibson.

"Will you both report to me in my private office in fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, sir," said Hal and Chester almost in one voice.

They, too, had alighted from the car and now stood at attention as General Pershing and Colonel Gibson ascended the few steps to the door of the old French villa.

"Wonder what he wants with us now?" said Hal, after the American commander had disappeared within.

"Maybe he wants us to drive him to Marshal Foch's headquarters in time for the conference Stubbs mentioned," replied Chester.

"By Jove! Maybe that is it," exclaimed Hal. "But I'd like to go farther than that. I'd like to be present at the conference."

"Guess that's asking a little too much," smiled Chester.

"Perhaps, but I'd give a whole lot to be there."

The lads continued to speculate until Hal, after a glance at his watch, announced that it was time to report to General Pershing. They ascended the steps and gave their names to the orderly at the door. They were ushered immediately into their commander's private office, thus indicating that the latter had given word to expect them.

General Pershing was seated at his desk in the far corner of the room when Hal and Chester entered. His back was to the door and he did not see them. The lads came to attention and waited.

After scrawling his name to several documents, General Pershing swung about in his chair.

"As you know," he said, addressing both lads without preliminaries, "my regular driver has been left far behind. It is imperative that I reach the headquarters of Marshal Foch by four o'clock this afternoon and for that reason I have decided to impress you into service as my driver, Lieutenant Paine."

"Very well, sir," said Hal, saluting.

"And you, Lieutenant Crawford," continued the American commander, "will accompany your friend because I know how inseparable you are."

"Thank you, sir," said Chester.

"Will you overhaul the car, lieutenant, and see

that it is perfectly fit?" instructed General Pershing.

Hal saluted again, and would have turned on his heel to depart, but his commander stayed him.

"One moment," he said. "I have done some thinking in the last few minutes and I am convinced that you young men are the ones I may have need of for a certain piece of important work. I can't say as much as I would like to right now. But I can say this: I shall confer with Marshal Foch and Marshal Haig this afternoon on a certain matter. If the conference results as I hope it will, I shall not have need of you; or if I fail to make my point I shall have no need of you. If the conference, however, fails to reach a definite decision I shall have need of at least two courageous and daring spirits. In view of your past successes, I believe that I may depend on you."

General Pershing paused.

"We will do the best we can, sir," said Hal.

"Because you must be familiar with my views to render the best possible service," General Pershing went on, "I am inclined to believe that it would be well to have you present at the conference."

Hal's heart leaped into his throat with joy. Chester had hard work repressing a wild hurrah. But neither said a word nor moved a facial muscle.

"You will learn at the conference," said General Pershing, "what I am not at liberty to say now."

"We know what we shall learn, all right," said Hal to himself.

"Now," continued the American commander, "if you will look over the car carefully, I will be with you inside of ten minutes."

Hal and Chester saluted their commander, wheeled on their heels and marched from the room.

"Hurrah, Hal!" shouted Chester when they were out of earshot of their commander's office. "What do you think of that?"

"I am afraid it's too good to be true," declared Hal. "I'm afraid I shall wake up and find it only a dream. Better pinch me so I know I'm not asleep. Ouch!" he cried, as Chester applied thumb and forefinger to his arm. "I didn't mean for you to take me literally. Guess I'm awake all right. Now for the car."

Hal went over the car carefully. It was in perfect shape. The gasoline tank was replenished and Hal gave the car a "drink." Hardly had he completed his task, when Chester cried:

"Quick, Hal! Here he comes!"

A moment later General Pershing, accompanied by two of his staff, climbed into the car. Hal took his place at the wheel. Chester sat beside him."

"A little speed, lieutenant!" said General Pershing, with a half smile.

Hal sent the big automobile forward.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONFERENCE

It was now after noon and Hal knew that it would require swift driving to reach Marshal Foch's headquarters, near Paris, before four o'clock, the hour of the conference. Nevertheless, the lad had perfect confidence in himself and his ability to handle the big army automobile, and he felt quite certain that he would reach the French commander's headquarters before the appointed hour, barring accidents.

Both Hal and Chester were almost bubbling over with excitement, for each felt sure that he was to be present at a time when history was to be made. Naturally, in spite of the fact that they had seen active service with the British and French, both had the utmost confidence in General Pershing and each was positive in his own mind that the counsel of the American commander would prevail.

The trip passed without incident. Hal kept the huge car going at top speed most of the time, slowing down only for the sharpest curves and to avoid

possible collisions with cars approaching from the opposite direction. Therefore, it was not yet half past three o'clock when the automobile drew into the outskirts of the little town where Field Marshal Foch, commander of all the Allied forces, had established his headquarters.

It became apparent as they moved into the village that news of the approaching conference had spread through the troops. The British, French and what few American soldiers there were in that particular sector cheered wildly as the automobile bearing the American commander-in-chief flashed by.

Directly Hal brought the machine to a halt in front of a house somewhat larger than the rest, over which floated the combined flags of the three nations—France, England and the United States. Hal guessed rightly that it was in this house that Marshal Foch made his headquarters.

Before the building was a long line of French soldiers. To the right, these were flanked by a platoon of British, while on the left stood the American guard of honor. Nearby was a large automobile bearing the British arms. Chester surmised correctly that Marshal Haig had already arrived.

General Pershing stepped lightly from his car. Before moving away, surrounded by his staff, he motioned Hal and Chester to follow him.

The lads followed their commander up the short

flight of steps and presently he and his staff were ushered into a large room in the rear on the first floor. At the door General Pershing was greeted by Marshal Foch and Marshal Haig in person, for the French and British commanders were not standing upon ceremony.

Inside, the three commanders took seats at a table in the center of the room, the members of their various staffs standing behind them. Besides the formal salutes when the three commanders met, there had been a hearty handshake all around. Now they were ready for business.

Marshal Foch arose and spoke to General Pershing.

"I have called this conference at your request, General," he said, "so it would seem to me that we should hear from you first."

Marshal Foch sat down and General Pershing rose to his feet.

"First, sir," he said, "I must explain the presence here of so many of my aides. Besides several members of my regular staff, I am accompanied by two young lieutenants whom, if I am not mistaken, Sir Douglas Haig knows well. I refer to Lieutenants Paine and Crawford."

Marshal Haig nodded to General Pershing and then to Hal and Chester.

"I know them well," he said, and then to Hal and Chester: "Glad to see you again, sirs."

Hal and Chester saluted stiffly.

"I have brought them here," said General Pershing, "in order that they may hear what I have to say, for it may be that I shall have need of them to prove to you the correctness of my views."

"You need make no apology for their presence, General," said Marshal Foch.

"Very well, sir," returned General Pershing. "I shall proceed."

Every ear in the room was strained to catch the next few words of the American commander, for there was not a man in the room who did not realize that it must have been a matter of prime importance thus to bring the three great commanders together. It is probable that most of the American officers present had a general idea of what General Pershing was about to propose; but neither the British nor French commanders or members of their staffs had had an inkling of it. Hal and Chester listened eagerly for General Pershing's next words.

"I want to ask you, gentlemen," said General Pershing quietly, toying with a paperweight on the table as he spoke, "whether you do not think we have remained passive long enough—whether it is not, in your opinion, time that we assumed the offensive rather than to wait until the enemy brings the fight to us?"

Marshal Foch and Marshal Haig were on their feet in a moment. Marshal Haig spoke first.

"You mean that you would have us attack at once?" he asked.

"I do, sir," returned General Pershing grimly.

There was an audible catching of breaths throughout the room. Marshal Foch was silent a full moment. Then he said:

"We haven't the men, general."

"Black Jack" Pershing scowled.

"What's the matter with the Americans?" he demanded. "I've a million of them over here and there are more coming. They've been here for months and have done practically nothing and they want to know why. What's the matter with the Americans, sir?"

Marshal Foch shrugged his shoulders and elevated his hands.

"But, sir," he protested, "they are untrained, unseasoned, raw troops. Surely you cannot expect them to stand against the enemy's veterans. It would be suicide."

"I agree with Marshal Foch," Marshal Haig interposed. "It is true they have proven their mettle wherever they have gone into action, but they have not had the training."

An angry light gleamed in General Pershing's eyes.

"They'll go any place you order 'em, sir. I'll stake my reputation on that," he thundered.

A hush of expectancy fell over the room. The air was surcharged with excitement.

In spite of the feeling of pride at his commander's words, Hal felt a thrill of fear shoot through him. Was it possible that the heads of the Allied armies were about to quarrel?

But Hal need not have worried. Men like these did not indulge in foolish quarrels. They spoke strongly because they felt strongly, and each realized that the other was advancing views that he considered best.

General Pershing brought a clenched fist down on the table. Pens and ink stands jumped and rattled.

"I say that we have delayed long enough," he declared. "What have we been doing to regain lost territory? Nothing. True, we've halted the enemy every time he struck, but we've not regained a mile of lost ground. I say it's time to hit back."

"If we only had the necessary numerical superiority," said Marshal Haig.

"I tell you, sir," said General Pershing, "that my men can stand up—yes, they can go through—the best the enemy has to offer. Their morale is the greatest of any army that ever existed. Order them to drive the enemy back, and they'll drive him back. I know what I am talking about, sirs. Try them!"

Again there was silence in the room, broken at last by Marshal Foch.

"It is well," he said, "for a general to have that confidence in his men; and I am sure that your men have every bit as much confidence in you. I am im-

pressed with your words; and yet I am loath to act on your suggestion with untried troops. I have seen such troops in action—the Portuguese. The enemy scattered them like chaff before the wind."

"My men are Americans, sir," said General Pershing simply.

"Oh, I know the traditions of the American fighting man," said Marshal Foch. "I know that the trained American soldier is the equal of any in the world. But still I hesitate. If I could only be sure that the enemy has exhausted himself in his latest offensive—if I only knew the disposition of his forces—then I might act. I have, of course, a general idea of the enemy's activities, but not enough, I am afraid, in ordering a grand offensive, as you suggest."

"I don't care anything about the enemy's positions," declared General Pershing. "What I say is this: Order the Americans to break the German line and they'll break it!"

Again Marshal Foch shook his head.

"I am afraid the time is not ripe," he said sadly.

For a moment General Pershing seemed on the verge of making an angry retort. Instead, he said quietly:

"I was prepared to hear you advance such views, sir, so I have another suggestion to offer."

"Proceed, sir," said Marshal Foch.

"It is this," said General Pershing: "I want to

ask you if you will act on my suggestion if I can gain for you such information as will convince you that the time is really ripe to strike? Will you act on my suggestion if I furnish you with better figures as to the enemy's strength in the various battle sectors and the disposition of his troops?"

"Why," replied Marshal Foch, "if you can show me that the time is ripe to strike, of course I shall strike. But I fear that is a very large task, sir."

"Very true, sir. Yet I shall endeavor to fulfill it. It was for that reason, sir, that I brought with me the two young lieutenants I mentioned."

Marshal Foch surveyed Hal and Chester keenly.

"They are very young," he said deprecatingly.

"True," said General Pershing, "yet I say with all positiveness that they are among the most capable of my officers."

"I can vouch for that, sir," said Marshal Haig.

Again Marshal Foch surveyed the lads closely, much to their embarrassment.

"Their names?" he asked of General Pershing.

"Lieutenants Paine and Crawford, sir."

"Lieutenants Paine and Crawford," said Marshal Foch, in a very quiet voice, "will you please step forward?"

CHAPTER XV

INTO THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

Hal and Chester advanced to the center of the room. They realized that all eyes were on them and they held themselves stiffly erect.

"It is high praise I have heard of you, sirs," said Marshal Foch quietly. "I trust that, should we have further need of your services, you will be as fortunate as I judge you have been in the past."

Hal and Chester bowed slightly, but said nothing. Marshal Foch turned to General Pershing.

"I do not know as there is need of further discussion," he said. "If you have decided, general, that you will entrust the work you have mentioned to these young officers, I should say that the sooner they get about it the better for all concerned."

General Pershing bowed.

"Very well, sir," he replied.

"In that event," continued Marshal Foch, "I declare this conference adjourned."

There was a scuffling of feet as the commanders and their staffs moved toward the door. Almost

before they had all departed, Marshal Foch had turned again to his desk and was immersed in a mass of documents and maps.

General Pershing led the way directly toward his automobile, and motioned Hal again to the driver's seat. Chester climbed in beside his chum.

"Back to my headquarters," General Pershing instructed Hal.

The return trip was made in silence and in record time.

As General Pershing alighted before his own quarters, he motioned Hal and Chester to accompany him to his office. Once there, he dismissed all members of his staff, and spoke to the two lads.

"You know, of course," he said, "what I wish you to ascertain for me, and you know also why I desire this information. If you are not prepared to undertake this mission, I wish you to understand that you may say so without fear of censure."

"We shall be very glad to do what we can, sir," said Chester.

"Very well," said General Pershing. "Now I want you both to realize the necessity of haste, but at the same time I want you to act with caution enough not to jeopardize the result of your mission. The main thing is that I must have the facts. That is why I believe it is better that two men be dispatched about the work. If one man comes to grief, the other may return safely. You understand that?"

"Perfectly, sir," replied Hal quietly. "You may be sure that neither of us will risk a failure merely to help the other."

"Well spoken," said General Pershing. "I feel sure that I could not entrust the task to better hands."

"Thank you, sir," was the reply from both lads.

"Now," said General Pershing, "I do not wish to burden you with orders and instructions. It is my belief that you have more chance of success if given a free hand. Therefore, I shall leave it to you entirely to choose your method of campaign. But remember the essential points—the strength and disposition of the enemy's troops in the various battle sectors, and the question of whether the morale of the German armies is still equal to withstanding an offensive such as I suggested at the conference."

"We understand, sir," said Chester.

"That is all then," said the American commander. "You will report to me the result of your mission at the earliest possible moment. I must impress upon you, however, the fact that results may be more far-reaching if you can make it convenient to return within seven days."

"We shall do our best to return within that time, sir," declared Chester.

"Then good luck to you," said General Pershing.

Both lads saluted again stiffly, turned sharply upon

their heels and left their commander's quarters.

"Well, Chester," said Hal, when they were outside again, "it seems that we have quite a sizeable task ahead of us."

"Right," agreed Chester, "and I can't say that I have any more idea of how to go about it than I have of capturing the Kaiser himself."

"Nor I. At the same time, however, we can both see that if we are to learn anything of the enemy's plains and conditions it is up to us to get in contact with the enemy."

"Exactly. But the question is, how? "

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"It's simply got to be done," he said.

Chester smiled.

"Sounds very simple, to hear you talk," he said. "Perhaps you can suggest a plan."

"Well," said Hal, "we've been within the German lines before. I guess we can get there again."

"Oh, it's easy enough to get in. The trouble is going to be getting out," Chester grinned.

"We'll have to take our chances there," declared Hal. "The first thing to do is get there. We'll worry about the return part of it later."

"Very good," said Chester, "but how are we going to get there?"

"There are several ways," said Hal. "We can go by airship, automobile, horseback, or we can walk."

"And we'll be taken prisoners in either case, most likely."

"That's true enough. But we can't do anything from here. However, we've been prisoners before now and have come through all right."

"But there may be a time when we won't come through," said Chester.

"Don't croak," said Hal. "You're beginning to talk like Stubbs, Chester."

"I'm not croaking," declared Chester. "But I believe in looking on both sides of a question."

"All well and good; but you'll agree with me that the first thing to be done is to get within striking distance of the enemy."

"Exactly, and I'm leaving it up to you to find the way."

"Well," said Hal, "I suggest that we take this automobile and keep going until we reach the German lines. We can concoct some cock and bull story that will account for our presence there."

"Maybe you can," said Chester. "I don't believe my imagination will carry that far."

"Climb in anyhow, and we'll be moving," said Hal.

Chester did as Hal suggested and a few moments later the large army automobile was again heading toward the front.

Upon Hal's advice, they did not return to their own regiment, but made straight for the front lines

now held by General Lawrence and his combined infantry and marines.

"We might as well go through there as elsewhere," Hal said.

"Anything that suits you suits me," was Chester's reply.

Before General Lawrence's headquarters, Hal brought the machine to a stop and sought counsel with the general. In a few words the lad explained the nature of their mission, and added:

"I wish you would have word sent to Captain O'Neil. He probably will be alarmed at our absence."

"It shall be done at once," was General Lawrence's reply.

Hal and Chester re-entered the automobile and continued their journey toward the enemy's country.

"By the way, Hal," said Chester, "don't you think it would be wise to discard these American uniforms?"

"Hardly," said Hal. "We don't want to be shot as spies, you know. In regulation uniform, the worst they can do if they capture us is to make us prisoners of war. But with a spy it's different."

"That's true enough," Chester agreed, "and still we have often found it convenient to enter the enemy's lines in civilian attire."

"I am against it in this case," Hal argued, "be-

cause we are working against time, in the first place. If we are taken prisoner, well and good. In fact, I am sure that we shall be captured."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then it seems to me that our mission is doomed to failure," said Chester.

"Not at all. I believe that we shall have more chance of making our escape if we are apprehended as American officers than if we are taken as possible spies. The life of a spy, or even a suspect, you know, is short."

"Looks to me," said Chester dryly, "as though the lives of Lieutenants Paine and Crawford were going to be short, no matter how you figure it."

"There you go croaking again," said Hal. "Never yell until you're hurt. That's a good axiom."

"It's too late then," declared Chester with a grin.

"Well," said Hal, "there is no use talking about it. Either we are going ahead or we are going to stay here."

"Let's be going then," said Chester. "I'm going to vote for you to lead this expedition, and whatever you say goes. That stands until we return to the American lines."

"Very good," said Hal. "So as long as I am the boss of the outfit, I'll give my orders. Get back into the automobile and we'll be moving."

Chester took his seat and Hal jumped to the wheel.

The automobile moved toward the front again.

The lads were hailed several times by American outposts as they went rapidly forward. To the Americans it must have seemed foolhardy for the two young officers to be driving directly toward the enemy's lines. But Hal did not slow down when hailed, so there was nothing for the American soldiers to do but let them pass.

And at the last the last American position had passed and the automobile moved into No Man's Land beyond.

A short distance away, Hal saw the German trenches.

"Well, here we go," he said quietly to Chester. "Maybe we'll get back and maybe we won't. But at all events, we'll give the best that is in us."

"Amen," said Chester fervently.

They drove straight toward the German lines. Five minutes after Chester's last remark, Hal slowed the car down in response to a sudden command.

"Halt!" came a sharp voice in German.

CHAPTER XVI

PRISONERS

IMMEDIATELY Hal had brought the car to a stop, he raised his hands high above his head. Chester followed his example. A moment later the machine was surrounded by a score of German soldiers, a lieutenant at their head.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the German officer sharply of Hal.

"By Jove, Hal!" cried Chester in well simulated surprise. "They're Germans. You've run right into a nest of the enemy."

"So it would seem," replied Hal, immediately falling in with Chester's ruse. "Now that's what I call bad luck."

This conversation was carried on in English, but Chester had hopes that the German officer or one of his men would understand it. Much to the lad's delight, the next remark came from the German lieutenant.

"So you've run into our lines accidentally?" he said. "Well, so much the worse for you. You're Americans, I take it?"

"We are," replied Hal, in German.

"I've always said," declared the lieutenant, "that you Americans would make fools of yourselves over here. You're a couple of fair examples; you can't even keep your sense of direction. Get out of that car."

Hal and Chester did as they were commanded, and as they alighted they were immediately surrounded by the soldiers.

"Are you armed?" asked the German.

Hal tossed a single automatic toward the lieutenant. Chester followed suit.

"There you are," said Hal.

For a moment the lad was afraid the enemy would search him and Chester for further weapons, but the man apparently never even thought of such action. Slyly Hal slipped his hand inside his coat and made sure that his second revolver was secure. Chester also had concealed a second revolver within his coat.

"Forward, march!" commanded the German officer, and Hal and Chester, hemmed in by enemy soldiers, set off at a swift pace.

Both lads kept their eyes open as they were led along. Apparently the position in which they found themselves was not well fortified, for it showed the result of hasty intrenching.

There was no firing in this particular sector of the battlefield for the moment, but to the north and

south Hal and Chester could hear the rumble of the big guns as the artillery duel continued on each flank.

"Where are you going to take us, lieutenant?"

"None of your business," was their captor's response.

"You're not a very civil sort of a fellow, are you?" demanded Hal.

"Hold your tongue, if you know what's good for you," was the response. "We don't have time to bother with a pair of American pigs. You'll be lucky if you are not ordered shot at once."

"Oh, I guess they won't shoot us," said Hal quietly. "We're prisoners of war, you know."

"Well, you wouldn't be the first to be shot off-hand," said the German lieutenant.

"I've heard that you're a rather barbarous lot," returned Hal, "but I didn't know you were as bad as that."

The German stepped close to Hal and shook his fist in the lad's face.

"That's enough out of you," he cried angrily.

"Don't make me laugh," said Hal, smiling.

For answer the man drew back his right hand and struck Hal a swift blow in the face. Hal, throwing off the men who surrounded him, promptly knocked the lieutenant down.

The man arose with blood streaming from his lips and an angry light in his eye. With his right hand

he drew his revolver, while he cried to his men:

"Shoot him!"

To the German soldier, an officer's word was law. It was not for the soldier to consider the merits of the case. An order had been given, and German discipline said that it must be obeyed.

A dozen rifles covered Hal instantly.

But an interruption came from an unexpected source.

"Stop!" cried a commanding voice.

Instantly the rifles were lowered and the soldiers came to attention, while the German lieutenant lowered his revolver and saluted stiffly.

Not ten paces away sat a German officer on horseback. He wore the shoulder straps of a general of infantry, as both lads saw at a glance.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the general.

"One of these men knocked me down, sir," the German lieutenant replied, "and I was about to have him shot."

"So," said the general, "and why did he knock you down, if I may ask, lieutenant?"

The German stuttered and hung his head. It was Hal who replied.

"He struck me first, your excellency."

"As I thought," said the German general. "I've heard of your actions before, Lieutenant Leffler. Do not let me hear of your offending again."

"But sir——" said the lieutenant.

"Enough!" was the general's stern command. "See that your prisoners are made secure and then report immediately to me."

The lieutenant saluted stiffly, but Chester noted an angry gleam in his eye.

"Humph!" said the lad. "He apparently has no love for his general. Looks like he would like to put a bullet through him."

The German commander, without further thought of his subordinate, had wheeled his horse and was about to ride away. At that moment the German lieutenant, with an audible snarl, suddenly whipped out his revolver and covered his general.

But Chester was too quick for the man.

Taking a quick step forward, he sent the would-be assassin's revolver spinning into the air by a sudden blow of his fist. The German lieutenant, thus foiled in his purpose, turned and grappled with the lad.

Hal sprang to his chum's assistance, while the German soldiers closed in about him.

The German general, attracted by the sounds of the commotion but not knowing what the trouble was about, wheeled his horse again and rushed into the thick of the melee.

"Here! Here!" he cried. "Stop that!"

Immediately the soldiers drew off. The German lieutenant, however, was too furious even to heed

the order of his commanding officer. His fingers sought Chester's throat.

But Chester, athlete that he was, was too quick for his opponent, and he held the man off despite the fact that in strength he was hardly a match for him.

The German lieutenant suddenly released his hold and stepped back. His hand dropped to his belt, where hung a long sheath knife. The knife flashed aloft and Chester staggered back quickly to avoid the descending blow.

Before the man could strike again, Hal sprang forward and seized the man's arm from behind. He twisted sharply and the knife fell to the ground. The German whirled quickly, but Hal dropped him with a well-directed right-hand blow to the point of the chin. The German lieutenant lay still.

The German general by this time had dismounted and had been hurrying forward even as Hal put his adversary down.

"Well done!" shouted the German commander in excellent English. "Well done, I say! But what is all this commotion about?"

"If you please, sir," said one of the soldiers, stepping forward, "Lieutenant Leffler was trying to shoot you when this American officer"—and he indicated Chester—"interfered."

"So?" exclaimed the general in utter astonishment. "It has come to this, eh? How dare a Ger-

man soldier lift a hand toward his superior officer!"

He drew near and stirred the prostrate body of Lieutenant Leffler with his foot. Then he turned to Chester.

"So I have to thank an enemy for saving my life, eh?" he said in a quiet voice. "I am sorry that we are enemies, sir, for I have been in your America. Well, I thank you. If there is anything I can do for you at any time, call upon me. But what are you doing within our lines?"

In a few words Chester repeated the story told the German lieutenant a few moments before.

"Lost, eh?" said the general. "Well, it's too bad, of course. I can't send you back to your own lines, for you have been captured within ours. That means that you are prisoners of war until the war ends, or until you are exchanged—which is unlikely," he added as an afterthought.

He turned to one of the soldiers.

"What's your name, my man?" he demanded.

"Loeder, sir!" replied the man addressed, saluting.

"Very well, Loeder. "I appoint you to make sure that the prisoners are turned over to Colonel Ludwig. You will also take Lieutenant Leffler there and confine him to his quarters, under arrest. A courtmartial shall sit on his case in the morning. You are in command of this squad, Loeder."

"Very well, sir," replied Loeder.

As Lieutenant Leffler was lifted to his feet at the command of Loeder, the German general again mounted his horse. As he was about to put spur to the animal, he seemed struck with a sudden thought, and with a command to Loeder, halted the march of the party surrounding Hal and Chester.

"A moment!" he called. "What are your names, sirs?"

Chester replied for both.

"I shall remember them," replied the German general quietly, "and if you are ever in need while within our lines, I ask that you call upon me. I am General von Mackensen!"

He wheeled his horse and rode rapidly away.

"Great Scott, Hal!" said Chester. "What do you think of that? I guess we're safe enough while we're here."

"So we are," agreed Hal dryly, "as long as they don't know just why we are here."

The lads about-faced with their captors and were led away.

CHAPTER XVII

BOUND FOR A GERMAN PRISON CAMP

"We're getting too far into Germany altogether, Hal," said Chester, as the train that was carrying them toward the enemy prison camp at Villingen, one of the many improvised shelters for captives that dotted the German frontier, sped along.

"I know it," said Hal. "It looks as though we were going to have a pretty stiff time getting back in time to do any good, if we get back at all before the war is over."

Chester gazed from the window of the car at the fleeting landscape.

"I don't know where we are," he said at length, "but we must have passed the German border. Also, we are bound north, so Villingen must be in the direction of Hamburg."

"Well, I don't know where we are either," declared Hal, "but if I had a good chance I'd jump off this train and take to my heels."

"What good would that do? If you didn't kill yourself, chances are they'd stop the train and the guards would pick you up again."

"Maybe so," said Hal, "but it's worth a chance, to my way of thinking. If we could get a long enough start we might be all right. Certainly, once free, we should be able to appropriate clothing enough to cover these uniforms, and once disguised, I defy any of these Boches to find us."

"Well," said Chester, casting a shrewd eye the length of the common day coach, "we're not so well guarded we can't try it if you say the word."

Hal also glanced up and down the aisle. Forward, the German guards had gathered together over a game of cards. There were no guards at the rear of the car, but both boys knew that the door was locked and the vestibule without, closed. It would take time to break through the door, open the vestibule and leap from the train.

"If we can get close enough to the door without arousing suspicion, there's a bare chance," whispered Hal. "If the train slows down a trifle and we pass through a woods or forest soon I am in favor of taking a chance."

"Suits me if it does you," declared Chester with a shrug of his shoulders.

"We'll see first whether we can get close to the door," said Hal. "You wait here a minute."

He arose and moved up the aisle. A German guard espied him from the other end of the car.

"Sit down!" he commanded in a gruff voice.

Hal turned and walked forward in the car.

"Just stretching my legs a bit," the boy said with a smile.

The German grunted, but made no reply.

Several times Hal paced back and forth through the car, stopping now and then for a word with some of the other prisoners. Eventually the German guards seemed to forget him entirely. Then Hal sat down on the arm of a seat near the door.

Chester, who had been watching Hal closely, now also arose and began pacing up and down, at last stopping close to Hal near the rear door of the car.

It seemed that Providence was guiding the actions of the two young Americans.

The speed of the train began to diminish. Inwardly, Hal and Chester were burning with excitement, but outwardly neither gave a sign that might betray them.

And then the train entered the fringe of a forest.

"Time, Chester," said Hal in a low voice.

He got to his feet and moved toward the door, Chester close behind him.

There was a sudden crash as Hal broke the glass pane in the door with his hand. With a single movement of his arm he swept clear the remaining fragments and leaped through the opening.

As Chester followed him, Hal opened the vestibule with two swift moves and leaped to the bottom step. Then, balancing himself carefully, he dropped from the car.

Hal was conscious of his feet striking something hard. Then he went down. The next he knew, Chester had seized his arm and was dragging him to his feet, shouting:

"Quick, Hal! They're stopping the train!"

Hal staggered to his feet and the boys dashed from the embankment and ran for the shelter of the trees. As they entered this retreat, the train stopped a short distance away, and German soldiers jumped to the ground with angry cries.

Just within the shelter of the trees, Chester stopped.

"Hurt, Hal?" he asked.

Hal shook his head.

"Guess not," he replied. "I did a bad job when I hopped off and lost my balance. I'm all right now, though. How about yourself?"

"I made it like a railroad man," was Chester's reply. "But come, we must get away from here. They're after us."

"Which way?" demanded Hal.

"Doesn't make any particular difference, I guess," replied Chester; "but straight ahead suits me."

He led the way at a rapid trot.

Behind, the lads could hear the cries of their pursuers, and they made as rapid progress as possible. After perhaps two minutes of walking, Chester, who was slightly in advance of Hal, stopped with a cry of dismay.

They had now come to the edge of the trees and with the first sight of the wide expanse of open ground before them, Chester realized that they were trapped.

"Now what do you think of that!" he ejaculated.

The little woods in which they found themselves could not have been ten rods in width or in length. The lads had simply jumped from the train in a little clump of trees. It would be but the work of a very few minutes for the German guards to surround the place and then close in on the fugitives.

"Well, that's what I call pretty hard luck," declared Hal. "And here comes the enemy. Hear 'em?"

Footsteps approached from behind.

"Surrender," replied Hal quietly. "We can't afford to let them kill us, you know, much as we might like to fight. While there's life there's hope that we may still be successful."

"Right," Chester agreed. "Well, here they are."

As the first German hove in sight, the man put his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The bullet passed between the two lads, who stepped quickly back.

"Wait!" called Hal before the man could fire again. "We surrender."

He raised his hands, as did Chester.

By this time other Germans had appeared and they rushed the lads angrily.

No more shots were fired, but the first man who came within striking distance of Hal reversed his rifle quickly and brought the butt down on the boy's unprotected head.

Hal dropped like a log.

Instantly Chester lost all idea of caution. With an angry cry he sprang at the man who had struck Hal and before the German could save himself, Chester stepped in quickly and wrenched the rifle from his hand. So quick was his action that none of the enemy had time to interfere, and raising the rifle aloft Chester served the German as the latter had his friend.

Instantly Chester became the center of a struggling knot of men. Thoroughly aroused by this unexpected resistance, the Germans attacked the lad with loud cries. Chester had no time to reverse his rifle and fire; the press of conflict was too great for that. Nevertheless, the lad fought as best he could with clubbed rifle, and then fists, feet and teeth.

The Germans snarled and shouted as they tried to bring Chester down, but Chester fought in silence.

But the odds were too great against the lad and at last he went down as a German rifle crashed on his head. He fell close beside Hal, and his head rested on his chum's knees.

And that was all that either boy remembered of the battle.

When Hal returned to consciousness, the train again was bumping its uneven way through the country. Hal looked around slowly. At first he did not realize where he was, but within a few moments the events of the last few hours came trooping back to his brain as he gazed around.

By his side, nearest the window, was Chester, still unconscious. Something felt uncomfortable on Hal's wrist. He moved his hand. The something on his wrist pulled. He looked down and for the first time saw that he and Chester had been handcuffed together.

He smiled to himself grimly.

"We put a little respect into them, anyhow," he told himself.

Chester now engaged his attention. In his present condition, Hal could do nothing for his friend, so he sat waiting for him to return to consciousness.

At last Chester's eyelids began to flutter and his eyes came open. They sought Hal's. Hal smiled.

"They got us," he said briefly.

Chester straightened himself up in his seat.

"So I see," he responded gloomily. "My head feels as though somebody had dropped a ton of coal on it."

"Looks it, too," said Hal. "It's all nicely bound up with a dirty rag, I see."

"Guess it looks as well as yours, at all events," Chester grumbled. "How do you feel?"

"Not much, and that's a fact," said Hal. "My head feels just like yours looks."

"I know just how it looks by sight of yours," returned Chester. "So naturally I know how you feel. Well, what will they do with us now?"

"Intern us in the prison camp, the same as they started to do. We'll have to work and eat next to nothing and it'll be pretty tough all around. But we'll make another break for liberty at the first opportunity."

"Here's hoping it comes soon," declared Chester.

The train slowed down, then stopped.

"Villingen; everybody change," sang out a Yankee soldier in the rear of the car.

CHAPTER XVIII

GERMAN BARBARISM

UNDER the muzzles of hundreds of German guns, the prisoners disembarked and were herded together near what Hal and Chester saw was an improvised station.

Villingen was located in one of the few mining districts in Germany not far from the Swiss border. Families of the miners had long since departed, but the Germans still extracted some coal from the ground by using prisoners of war beneath the surface.

It was for such work that Hal and the other American prisoners had been brought to Villingen. While German prisoners captured by the Allies had always been well treated, Allied prisoners in German camps had been forced to undergo cruel and inhuman treatment from the early days of the war. A peculiar feature was the fact that seldom did the German authorities distinguish between officers and privates. Often British or French officers labored side by side with private soldiers in the mines and in the fields.

When the prisoners had been herded together, the German commandant of the camp approached. He was a porkish-looking individual and typically Prussian. He answered to the name of Colonel Bretz. The officer who had been in charge of the train of prisoners approached and engaged the commandant in conversation.

By the frequent looks that the pair cast at Hal and Chester, the lads knew that they were the chief subjects of the conversation. Directly the commandant walked up to them.

"Another attempt to escape and you'll be shot like dogs!" he bellowed. He turned to one of his aides. "Put them in one of the guard cells," he continued; "then put these other swine," with a sweeping gesture that included the other prisoners, "in their pens and see that they are ready to go on the night shift to-night."

He strode away. While the other American soldiers, covered by German guns, were driven toward what had once been the living quarters of the German miners, now hemmed in with steel bars—a mammoth cage—Hal and Chester were seized by a squad of soldiers and hurried in the opposite direction, where they at last were shoved into a filthy, dirty, single-story building.

It was very dark inside and for a moment the lads were unable to get a view of their surroundings. But as their eyes became accustomed to the

darkness, they perceived that they were in what at one time must have served as a store building. The single room was very small and its furnishings consisted of two dilapidated chairs and a mass of dirty rags, apparently meant for a bed, on the floor.

"Nice, sanitary-looking place," was Hal's comment, as he walked about his prison.

"Guess a fellow wouldn't grow very fat here," said Chester. "Wonder how long we'll be cooped up?"

Hal shrugged.

"No telling," he replied, "but when we get out we'll probably be sent down in the mines."

"Surely they won't send us there in our present condition," declared Chester.

"I don't imagine they'll worry about a couple of sore heads," rejoined Hal. "However, time will tell."

"Well," said Chester, "I'm about tired out. Think I'll try to sleep a bit."

"Same here; but I'll take the bare floor for mine. I can't stomach that mass of dirty rags there. They must be infested with vermin."

"The floor's bad enough," Chester agreed.

They threw themselves down and in a few moments were fast asleep in spite of the hard floor, for both were tired out and could have slept almost any place.

It was still dark when they were aroused from their slumbers by the presence of a third figure in the room. Hal opened his eyes as a heavy foot stirred him and a voice exclaimed in German:

"Get up. You'll have to earn your keep here."

Hal arose and Chester also got to his feet.

"Outside, now, and march quick!" said the German lieutenant who had awakened them.

The two lads preceded the man from their prison. Outside, they inhaled the fresh air eagerly and their spirits revived.

"Where are you taking us?" demanded Hal.

"To the mines," returned the German with a snarl, "where you'll loose that fresh look you possess now."

"You're making a mistake," said Hal quietly. "We're not miners—know nothing about mines. We've never been below."

"You'll be miners or corpses within the next few days," bellowed the German. "Go on there!"

"How about some grub?" questioned Hal. "We've had nothing to eat for more than twenty-four hours. We won't be able to work very well without food, you know."

"You'll eat to-night," snarled the German. "Not before."

Hal shrugged again. He was hungry, felt faint, even, and so did Chester, but there was no help for it. The lads trudged on in silence.

Soon they came to the opening of the mine shaft, some distance from where they had spent the night. Other forms began to gather, and Hal guessed rightly that this was the new shift coming to work.

Men commenced to appear from below, their faces, hands and clothing black. These, the lads knew, were the prisoners who had been working all night.

There was a faint streak of light in the east. The day would break soon.

Now the German guards hustled Hal and Chester and the other prisoners into the mine shaft, where they were told off into crews of four and five men each. Hal and Chester found themselves together, with a British infantryman and a French sergeant of cavalry completing their crew. Directly, picks were thrust into their hands, and they were provided with gas helmets, upon each of which burned a small safety light. Then they were marched to the mouth of the shaft, where they awaited their turn at the car that was to carry them below.

"You fellows have not been down before, I take it," said the English private to Hal.

"This is the first trip," replied Hal.

"Too bad," was the response. "It'll be torture for you. You will probably collapse before time to come up, in which case you'll be kicked back to consciousness. That's what happened to me."

"If they begin kicking me, they'll have to go a bit further," said Hal grimly.

"That was what I thought," said the Englishman. "I put up a fight, but it wasn't any use. They almost beat the life out of me, after which I was put in solitary confinement with nothing to drink and almost nothing to eat. Let me tell you, solitary confinement is worse than the mines, so if you'll take my advice, you'll stick and endure as long as you can, and when you've been kicked back to consciousness again you'll return to work and keep your mouth shut. Am I right, Mercer?" he demanded, turning to the Frenchman.

"Oui, monsieur," returned the latter briefly.

Again Hal shrugged.

"We'll see," he said shortly.

Under the guns of the guards, the four men took their places in the little elevator-car that was to carry them below.

"Get your last look at the outside world," said the Englishman, as the starter gave the signal to descend. "It'll be the last you get for some time."

The little car seemed to drop from beneath the feet of Hal and Chester as it shot down in the mine. Hal was conscious of a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Chester drew his breath sharply.

The car stopped as suddenly as it had started.

"Here we are," said the Englishman. "Get out."

He led the way.

Dimly Hal and Chester could make out the interior of the mine by the light of their torches. The air was damp and cold. Both lads shivered.

"This," explained the Englishman, "is No. 10 level. There are levels above and below us. We've quite a ways to go, so we'll ride."

Hal now saw for the first time that a steel track was before him. On this was a little car, driven by electricity. It was not a passenger vehicle, but was used for hauling the ore when mined. The car was manned by a single German, armed.

Without a word, the Frenchman took the motorman's place. Hal, Chester and the Englishman climbed aboard and the car moved forward, the departure being made under the rifle of the German guard.

"Isn't it dangerous down here?" asked Chester of the Englishman. "I don't know anything about mines except that there are many fatalities in them."

"About the only danger is that of an explosion," the Briton replied. "If somebody should strike a match, we'd all be blown to kingdom come—at least every man on this level."

"There are more on this level, then?" asked Chester.

"Oh, yes; probably half a hundred men. Some are ahead of us and directly more will come along here."

"Seems to me that there might be an opportunity

of making a break for liberty," declared Hal. "There are not many guards about."

"Not here," the Englishman agreed, "but wait till you get to the pit. There are guards enough there and they make life as miserable for the prisoners as possible. You're expected to work from the minute you arrive until you knock off or collapse; and if you go under, you'll start back to work the minute you recover."

The little car slowed down and the lads saw light ahead. It was not daylight, however, but light made by the glow of many torches. Directly the car stopped and the four occupants climbed out. Men stood about with picks and shovels, awaiting the word to go to work.

Hal and Chester found themselves placed close together with the Englishman, who gave the name of Harding, and the Frenchman, Mercer, as their nearest neighbors.

There came a command from one of the German guards and the men attacked the solid wall before them with picks and drills.

"Well," said Hal grimly, "here's where we go to work, Chester."

The lads wielded their picks with the others.

CHAPTER XIX

REVOLT

It was not yet six o'clock in the morning when the first day shift went to work. Under the advice of the Englishman, Hal and Chester worked as slowly as possible, the better to accustom their muscles to their new task. But after an hour's work, Hal commenced to grow tired.

Nevertheless, the lad did his best, for common sense told him that it would be wise not to lag. Soon after eight o'clock, however, his arms ached so that it seemed impossible for him to work longer.

He staggered slightly as he drove his pick home.

This movement did not escape the keen eye of the nearest German guard, who immediately approached and stood watching the lad closely. Again Hal staggered and his pick fell short of its mark.

"Get to work there!" cried the guard sharply.

Hal tried his best, but it was no use. The pick fell from his tired hands.

The guard stepped quickly forward and struck

the lad sharply across the face with his open left hand. Under the blow, Hal received new strength as his fighting spirit was aroused. He stepped toward the guard, an angry gleam in his eye and his fists clenched.

The German hastily moved back a couple of paces and half raised his rifle.

"Get to work!" he cried again.

The lad bethought himself of the Englishman's advice, and stooping, recovered his pick. Again he attacked the wall of coal.

Chester's strength, meantime, had also given out. Unlike Hal, however, Chester did not work on until he could no longer lift his pick. When he felt that he could no longer dig, he cast his pick away from him and sat down on the ground. Immediately a guard was at his side.

"Up out of there, you American pig!" he commanded.

Chester glanced at the man idly, but said nothing. Neither did he get to his feet.

But the lad was moved from his position by the square toe of the guard's heavy boot. Away went Chester's thoughts of caution. With a single move, he seized his pick and sprang forward. The guard gave ground.

The pick flashed above the lad's head and then came down sharply. The German escaped the blow by a quick leap backward. Instantly he lowered his

rifle and there was a flash and a report. Chester heard the bullet sing past his ear.

There came a tramping of hurried feet as other guards, fearing a concerted revolt, rushed to the aid of their companion. Gleams of hope lighted the eyes of the prisoners. Hardly a man there who, at one time or another, had not thought of escape, and now, to many, it seemed that the time was ripe.

They rushed into the melee.

Came the sound of blows and curses in the half-light. Several rifles spoke.

Hal, realizing Chester's danger, in spite of the aches in his limbs, sprang to his feet and dashed into the knot of struggling men. British arms struck out right and left. Frenchmen kicked out with their heavy boots and bit and clawed. Hal and Chester, the only Americans below ground in this section, fought swiftly and silently.

But there was only one possible ending for a struggle such as this. Had the movement been preconceived and launched in a concerted attack, the result might have been different, although even that is doubtful. As it was, outnumbered and with all the firearms in the hands of the Germans, it was only a matter of minutes until the prisoners must be subdued.

Among the most prominent in the fight was the Englishman Harding. He was a powerful man, as Hal had noted at first glance. Day after day of toil

in the mines had added wonderfully to his strength and he now laid about with his pick with the fury of a madman.

Half a dozen guards he had laid low when a German bullet crashed into his body and brought him to the ground. His fall seemed to dishearten the other prisoners, who seem to have looked upon him as a leader. Their resistance grew feebler and they gave ground.

The German guards by this time had succeeded in getting together and now they covered the prisoners with a score of rifles.

"Fire!" came a command.

In the huddled mass of prisoners, five men tumbled over. Two others groaned and others cursed.

There was no second volley.

Realizing that he had the mutiny under control, the German officer in command withheld another fire. The prisoners scattered as the guards advanced. Hal and Chester were left standing alone to face the Germans.

Both lads by this time had realized the utter foolishness of further resistance and now quietly awaited whatever was to come. The German officer turned to his men.

"Who started this?" he demanded. "Show me the leader of this plot!"

The man whom Chester had attacked, and who was still on his feet, stepped forward and saluted.

"Those two Americans, sir," he said, pointing to Hal and Chester.

"So!" exclaimed the German captain.

He stepped close to the lads, his revolver ready in his right hand for instant use.

"Oh!" he said, "you are the new arrivals, eh? Well, you shall see how we treat such as you!"

He reversed his revolver suddenly and brought the butt down on Chester's injured head. The lad dropped to the ground.

With a cry Hal sprang forward and before the German captain could protect himself Hal's right fist sent him staggering back.

Cries of joy arose from the prisoners and for a moment it seemed that the struggle of a few moments before would be renewed.

But the German soldiers sprang forward and the prisoners became quiet again. Two men rushed forward and threw their arms about Hal, rendering him powerless. A third raised his rifle and brought the stock down on Hal's head with a crash. The lad toppled over.

When he again became conscious of what was going on about him, he still lay on the hard and damp ground. Above him stood a grinning guard. Hal felt a pain in his head and passed a hand over the spot. When he withdrew it, it was covered with blood.

"Get up!" commanded the German guard.

Hal realized the necessity of immediate compliance and staggered to his feet.

"Get your pick!" commanded the guard.

Hal obeyed.

"Now get back to work!"

There was no help for it, and in spite of his weakness Hal wielded his pick with the others.

At his right, Hal saw that Harding, with several ugly wounds in his head, also was back at work. The man smiled slightly as he caught Hal's eye.

"You see, you started something we all couldn't finish," he said in a low voice. "These Germans have discovered the way of putting down a mutiny, as you have learned. Of course the time may come when we shall catch them unprepared, but it hasn't come yet, so lie low. Hello," he added, "your friend is coming to his senses. If he's wise he'll get up and work till he drops."

Chester, under the command of the guard who stood close to him, got to his feet and fell to work close to Hal. The lad's face was very pale and he seemed in imminent danger of collapsing at any moment.

"Can you stick it out, Chester?" asked Hal in a low voice.

"I don't know," was his chum's reply. "I feel pretty faint."

"Silence, there!" thundered the nearest guard. "Work; don't talk."

The prisoners worked on in silence. Each stroke that Chester took he felt sure would be his last. But he gritted his teeth and stuck to it, and some way he always found the strength for one more blow.

Harding nodded approvingly.

"They'll do," he muttered.

Strange as it may seem, after another half hour's work Hal felt his strength returning to him. It took less effort to wield his pick. The lad was hungry and he felt an uncomfortable gnawing within, but the dizziness had left him.

Chester also began to feel better. The faintness left and color returned to his cheeks.

"Six months of this work," he whispered to Hal, "and I'll be able to lick your marine friend, Bowers, without exerting myself."

Hal smiled slightly, but he drew a breath of relief. When Chester talked like that he was not badly hurt.

"What time do we quit?" Hal asked of Harding in a low voice.

"Usually about two o'clock," was the reply.

"What! Don't we knock off to eat?"

Harding allowed a wry smile to steal over his face.

"We do not," he replied. "And the chances are that as a result of the trouble here we won't eat at all to-day."

Hal gazed at him in pure alarm.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me they will starve us."

"Not quite," was the Englishman's reply, "but I've gone three or four days at a time without a morsel."

"But a man can't work unless he eats," declared Hal.

"Maybe not; but the Germans are not worrying about that. If we want to eat we've got to work and make no trouble. That's all there is about it. Let me tell you something. I've seen at least twenty men carried out of here and they are not living now. They were simply starved to death. These Germans will go the limit. Don't make any mistake about that."

Hal turned this over in his mind.

"Well," he said to himself at last, "we're up against it and that's all there is about it. I am afraid General Pershing would have done better had he entrusted his mission to other hands. We seem to have made a mess of it."

He turned to Chester.

"Say," he demanded in a soft voice, "what do you suppose General Pershing would think if he could see us now?"

Chester grinned despite his wounds.

"I guess he'd think we are a pair of confounded poor spies," he declared.

CHAPTER XX

MORE GERMAN CRUELTY

TRUE to Harding's prediction, there was no let-up in the work until two o'clock that afternoon. At that hour the German guards passed the word and the prisoners dropped their tools and wiped moist brows. Hal and Chester found themselves beside Harding, the Englishman, and Mercer, the Frenchman, once more.

"Now what?" asked Chester.

"Back to our holes," replied Harding. "I mean," he added, catching the question in Chester's face, "back to the filthy little shacks where we sleep and spend our leisure hours."

Several cars now appeared along the little track in the mine and the prisoners clambered aboard. These then proceeded to the main shaft, where the men were carried aloft a few at a time.

Not for a moment did the German guards relax their vigilance. Rifles were held ready for instant use. More than once they had been caught unprepared and several times batches of prisoners had

succeeded in making their escape. Some had been recaptured, but others had found their way back to their own lines.

Hal and Chester were carried up in the car with Harding and Mercer and two other British prisoners. For some reason, both lads had decided unconsciously to stick as close as possible to the big Englishman, and he appeared glad of their company.

Under the guns of the guards, the prisoners were marched across the open to a row of shacks in the distance.

"Wonder where they'll put us, Chester?" said Hal.

"Don't know," replied Chester, "but I can't see that it makes any difference."

"There is room for a couple of more in my shack," said Harding. "You boys just walk in with me as though you belonged there. Maybe they'll let you stay."

The lads acted on this advice and a few moments later were in the little hovel that Harding called home. Hal took in his surroundings with a calculating eye.

There was only one window, through which the sun now streamed. There was no door beside the one through which they had entered. Hal gave a start of surprise when he saw that the window was not barred.

"I thought of course they'd have bars there," he said, pointing. "Looks to me like a fellow might crawl out in the middle of the night."

"So you could," returned Harding, "but that wouldn't help anything. There are thousands of armed guards around this place. You wouldn't have much of a chance getting through."

"It's been tried, though, I suppose?" queried Chester.

"Yes; and there's a graveyard behind us that has more occupants as a result. I believe that several men have succeeded in getting through, but I can't say positively. It's only talk among the prisoners."

"Haven't you ever thought of making a break for liberty, Harding?" demanded Hal.

The Englishman looked at the lad curiously. He was silent for some moments.

"Let me tell you something," he said at last. "There isn't a prisoner in this camp who is not thinking of escape every waking minute. Why, we even dream about it. As a matter of fact, we scarcely think of anything else. Every now and then conditions become so intolerable that a man, or a batch of men, makes the attempt. Mostly, they have some plan in their minds, but sometimes they simply act on the spur of the moment."

Harding mused a moment in silence. Hal and Chester did not interrupt him.

"I have in mind a man named Judson," continued Harding at last. "He had been working in the mines for months. He was a big, husky chap—an Englishman. One of the guards below found particular delight in annoying him. He was safe enough in this, for it was apparent that Judson could not thrash his tormentor and the other guards as well. For days Judson bore the torment in silence and then he could stand it no longer."

"What did he do?" demanded Chester eagerly.

"Why," said Harding, "he simply diverted a blow of his pick to the guard and that settled the German. Then, before the remaining guards, who were stunned momentarily by the suddenness of the act, could even think, Judson was among them swinging his pick right and left. You know," he broke off, "it's funny what a little thing will raise the hopes of every prisoner in the camp. Every man sees in each little breach of discipline—each little mutinous act—the opportunity for which he thinks he has been waiting. It was so in Judson's case.

"As the guards sprang in to seize Judson, every prisoner in sight entered the conflict. Picks and shovels and drills were our weapons. For a moment we made headway, the attack was so sudden. But we didn't have a chance. The guards turned their rifles on us and it only took a few minutes to quell the disorder. Five prisoners were killed."

"And Judson, what happened to him?"

Again Harding was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"Frankly, I'd rather not talk about that. But having heard so much of the story, I guess you are entitled to the rest. You see, Judson did considerable damage with that pick before he was overcome. Besides the first guard, he felled three more of the Germans before they could subdue him. They couldn't have done it then except that a guard closed in from behind and shot him through the head."

"And killed him?" asked Hal.

"No," said Harding, "the bullet didn't kill him, worse luck. It would have been better if it had. Now comes the part I don't like to talk about." The lads saw the Englishman's great hands clench and unclench as he talked and they knew that a terrible anger was raging within him.

"What happened?" asked Hal in a low voice.

"Why," said Harding, "they took Judson to the surgeon, had his wound dressed and gave him some clean clothes. Then, the next day, right at the mouth of the mine as the shafts changed and practically every prisoner in the camp was there, they killed him."

Hal and Chester shuddered.

"How?" asked Hal softly.

"That's the horrible part of it," said Harding in a choking voice. "They tied him to a post stuck in the ground for that purpose. Then a score of guards

drew off twenty paces and unslung their lances. These they then began to use as spears, hurling them from that distance. It was plain, of course, that they did not mean to kill Judson instantly—from that distance there are few men who can launch a death throw—particularly with a lance. The first weapon struck Judson a glancing blow in the side—he had been stripped to the waist—it was a terrible sight." Harding broke off again.

"Why did you stay?" demanded Hal, who was raging furiously within as Harding proceeded with his story.

"There was no help for it," the man replied. "We were herded there under the guns of a hundred or more guards. Well, every lance thrown brought cheers and jeers from the guards—but there came never so much as a groan from Judson. I don't know how long it lasted—it seemed like hours, though I suppose it was only a matter of minutes. Pierced in scores of places, Judson at last found eternal peace."

Harding dropped suddenly into a little chair and buried his face in his hands. For the moment, Hal and Chester were too greatly shocked by this tale of barbarism to utter a word. Chester's hand clutched Hal's arm.

"Isn't it terrible?" he whispered. "And to think that these men call themselves Christians!"

Harding overheard the remark and looked up.

"Christians!" he echoed. "Let me tell you something. The atrocities of the Turks in Armenia that we have heard so much about pale into insignificance alongside the cruelties of the Germans. Not for nothing have they won the name 'Hun.'

"Poor Judson!" he continued. "He was my pal. Never shall I forget that sight. Sometimes in my dreams I see it now, and I awake with a scream. Now, my lads, do you wonder that while every prisoner here is thinking of escape he hesitates to make the attempt?"

"I should say not!" declared Hal. "But the Huns must answer for all this—their time of reckoning will come."

"Yes, but it will not be in proportion to the punishment they deserve," said Harding, "and that is what makes it so hard to bear. Cruelties that they have inflicted upon their prisoners will not be repaid in kind—there is no such barbarism in the hearts of the Allied nations. But," and Harding brought his clenched fist into his left palm with a resounding smack, "the debt should be paid in kind."

"No, no, Harding," said Chester quietly. "We cannot lower ourselves to the level of these barbarians. Remember what the Good Book says: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'"

Again Harding buried his face in his hands. When he again looked up there was a more peaceful expression in his face—his eyes had lost their hardness.

"You are right," he said quietly.

"Now," said Chester, turning the subject, "the question is what they will do with us in view of the trouble we stirred up to-day?"

Harding shrugged.

"It's hard to tell," he answered. "It all depends on their mood. It may be that they will prescribe a week or so of solitary confinement, the lash, or the matter may be overlooked. You never can tell."

"Great Scott!" said Hal. "We can't stand for solitary confinement. I must tell you something, Harding. It is absolutely necessary that we get away from here without delay—at least that we make the attempt."

Harding shook his head.

"Remember the story of Judson," he said slowly.

"Well, it can't be helped," declared Chester. "We'll have to risk it."

Harding looked at the lad sharply.

"You mean that you have some particular reason?" he asked.

Chester nodded affirmatively, and then, in a few words, explained the mission with which they had been entrusted by General Pershing.

"I can realize the necessity of haste," declared Harding, a strange light in his face, "and now I will tell you something. I have considered the situation from every angle and I believe that I have found a plan that promises success."

"You have?" exclaimed Chester eagerly.

"Yes," said Harding, "and now that the necessity has become so urgent we shall make the attempt to-morrow."

Hal and Chester stifled their joy in subdued exclamations of delight.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ESCAPE

THE rest of the day was spent in discussing the plan of escape; and that night Hal and Chester slept well in spite of the fact that they were compelled to stretch out on the hard floor and that there were no blankets nor other clothing to keep out the early morning chill.

As upon their first day in the mines, they were aroused before daylight and marched to the shaft. It was still dark when they again found themselves below and at work.

Hal and Chester put forth their best efforts from the first, for they did not wish to draw the attention of the guards to them particularly and thus interfere with Harding's plans.

It was just eleven o'clock when Harding lowered his pick and turned to the nearest guard.

"Bad spot here, sir," he said. "Gas. It's dangerous."

The guard approached and sniffed.

"Go on with your work," he said at last.

Harding made no reply, but picked up his pick and fell to work again.

A close observer might have seen him turn slightly to the man on his right, who chanced to be the Frenchman Mercer; a close observer might have seen Harding's lips move slightly, and a keener ear than that of the nearest German guard might have caught these words:

"It's time, Mercer. Pass the word. Be ready in five minutes."

Mercer indicated that he understod and passed the word quietly. To Harding's left, Hal also passed the word to the nearest man: "Be ready in five minutes."

Harding had explained the day before that every prisoner in the shaft had been taken into his confidence—that he, having conceived the scheme, was entitled to be the man who had the first right to escape. This, Hal and Chester had learned, was the unwritten law among prisoners in Germany. Others who were in the plot would escape if it were possible, but they must shield the man who conceived the idea.

In less than the time allowed by Harding, every prisoner knew that the big Englishman had decided to "go."

There was no indication in the face of any man that he knew something was about to happen and so the suspicion of the guards was not aroused.

Stealthily, Harding drew something from his pocket. It was a match which he had secreted in the lining. He drew even closer to the wall of earth before him.

There, it could be seen, he had dug a little pocket. At this point there was a stronger smell of gas.

"Look out!" cried Harding suddenly.

At the same moment he struck the match, he dropped his pick and shielded his face with his hand. At the same moment, too, every prisoner covered the glow of his safety lamp with his hat.

There was a flash and a roar, followed by the sound of tumbling earth. Hal and Chester felt their arms seized in a strong grip which they knew to be that of Harding.

"Come!" he whispered.

Came now sounds of confusion and hoarse guttural shouts from the German guards. Behind them the lads heard the sounds of confusion. Then they felt themselves drawn back by Harding's hands.

"In here!" whispered the Englishman.

Chester now exposed his light sufficiently to show that the three were in what appeared to be a small cavern leading off from the mine tunnel itself.

Hastily, under Harding's directions, the lads pushed forward large lumps of ore and dirt until now they were almost barricaded behind this fortification and seemed safe from prying eyes without.

"Not too much," said Harding. "We've got to breathe, you know."

"What was all the explosion?" demanded Chester.

"Well," said Harding, "when a man strikes a match in a mine there is bound to be an explosion. I struck the match."

"I know that," agreed Chester, "but how does it happen that we are still alive? You might have brought the whole mine in on us."

"I've worked in mines before," said Harding. "These little local blasts don't amount to much if you keep away from the flare. However, a man never knows when he hears the blast just how serious it may be. That's why the German guards are in such confusion. I am not worried because I know the nature of the blast, and the other prisoners are not worried for the same reason. Hear them fight!"

The sounds of the struggle carried plainly to the ears of the three friends.

"Somebody will be killed," declared Chester.

"Naturally," said Harding quietly, "but it will be in a good cause and they know it. Don't mistake me, boys; every man there knows that I am not doing this just to try to save my own skin. The word has been passed."

"It has?" exclaimed Hal in surprise.

"Of course, and I pride myself in the fact that it was done cleverly if you didn't see it."

"I didn't see anything," said Chester.

"Neither did the guards, apparently," said Harding. "But we had better keep quiet now. Remember, we have long hours ahead of us here and then work to do before we are free."

The three became silent. The sounds of conflict without continued for possibly half an hour, then gradually died away.

But the sounds of the picks were no longer heard. There would be no more work in No. 10 level until after the German authorities had assured themselves that it was safe. For this purpose, of course, an inspection would be necessary.

"They'll miss us, too," whispered Hal, "and they'll have a look for us."

"And they will think they have located us when they encounter a mass of debris near where we stood," said Harding.

"Oh, caused by the blast, eh?" said Chester.

"No; put there through Mercer's efforts," replied Harding. "You see," he explained, "we had already dug in such a manner that a certain piece of rock could be unloosened by a couple of quick blows. Mercer gave them after I struck the match."

"Great Scott! You seem to have had it figured out perfectly," declared Hal.

"So I did," replied Harding, "up to the point when we reach the outside. After that events will have to shape themselves."

"But when they explore the debris out there and don't find us, they will smell a mouse," declared Chester.

"They won't explore it right away," declared Harding. "The inspection of the mine itself will come first."

Harding proved a good prophet in this.

It was perhaps 2 o'clock in the afternoon when Hal heard footsteps approaching. The three friends listened intently.

Voices were conversing in German, and from their refuge the lads caught the glow of safety lamps.

"Must be four or five of them," declared Hal in a low voice.

"I hope so," Harding whispered back. "There must be at least three for the success of my plan."

The inspectors, for such the lads knew the Germans to be, passed along the mine tunnel so close to the refuge of the three friends that Hal could have reached out and touched one of them.

"We'll let 'em go by because there may be more coming, though it is unlikely," said Harding. "You were right, boy, there are four of them."

The Englishman waited until the four inspectors had turned an angle in the tunnel, and then, quickly removing the debris they had piled in front of them, the three friends stepped out.

"Now," said Harding "we'll get as close to that

turn as possible, and we'll nail 'em when they come back."

They took their positions and waited in silence, every nerve on edge.

Directly the sound of footsteps were heard again and the Germans returned, conversing and utterly unconscious of the danger that lay in wait.

As the first man appeared around the turn, Harding's right fist shot out and the man tumbled over. Instantly the Englishman and Hal and Chester were upon the other astonished inspectors.

"Hands up!" cried Harding.

But the Germans, realizing that their opponents were unarmed, reached for their revolvers. Hal sprang forward and closed with the nearest German before the man could press the trigger. The lad staggered him with a powerful blow to the nose, followed by a left to the chin that sent him down. Hal then possessed himself of the man's revolver and turned to aid his friends should they need assistance.

Chester's adversary had fired as the lad rushed him, but the bullet had missed its mark. As Hal now came to Chester's assistance, the German held his hands high, dropping the revolver.

Harding, meantime, had disposed of the fourth inspector with promptness and dispatch, a heavy blow behind the ear laying the man low.

"Quick, now," said the Englishman. "Change clothes with them. I'll change with this big man here. I guess they'll fit."

The change was made quickly.

"Now to get out of here," said Harding.

The three walked quickly along the tunnel to the little mine car, which they boarded. Harding became the motorman and the car moved off.

"The men at the top will wonder what has become of the fourth inspector, won't they?" asked Chester, as they alighted from the mine car at the edge of the shaft.

"We'll have to trust to luck there," said Harding.

The three stepped in the elevator that was to carry them aloft, and Harding gave the signal to pull up by tugging sharply at the cable.

"Keep your caps down over your head and your heads lowered," Harding cautioned, as the car began to go up.

The lads nodded in the semi-darkness, but said nothing.

Suddenly the elevator shot out into the light and came to a stop. From beneath their caps, the three friends glanced sharply about them, and Chester gave a sigh of pure relief.

At the top of the mine there were, at that moment, only three German guards and the man who stood on watch at the elevator. The three guards were engaged in animated conversation and appar-

ently were not interested in the appearance of the car from below. There remained only the fourth man.

Harding stepped from the car. Hal and Chester followed him.

CHAPTER XXII

FLIGHT

WITHOUT a word Harding led the way directly from the mine. The three German guards looked up as the friends passed and saluted, for Harding, Hal and Chester were all attired in German uniforms that bore captains' stripes. The three returned the salutes and passed on.

"Now what, Harding?" asked Hal.

"Leave it to me," was the reply. "I know where there are half a dozen big automobiles, but I'm afraid we'll have to impress a driver into service."

"I'll do the driving," said Hal.

"Oh, you can drive, eh?" said Harding. "So much the better."

Fifteen minutes' walk brought the three friends within sight of the spot where the automobiles were parked.

"Better pick that long, low car there," whispered Hal. "It looks as though it could show some speed."

Harding nodded.

Several guards stood about the automobiles. They saluted as the three pseudo German officers appeared, but said nothing. Hal climbed into the driver's seat of the car he had selected, while Harding and Chester jumped into the tonneau.

"Let her go!" exclaimed Harding, "but slowly unless there is some sign of suspicion. If we start off too fast they'll know there is something wrong."

The car moved off slowly.

Half an hour later they were out of sight of the prison camp. It was then that Chester leaned forward and touched Hal on the arm.

"Which way now?" he asked.

"I judge that this road will take us to the Swiss border," said Hal.

"Right you are," agreed Harding.

"Trouble is," said Chester, "that we don't want to get out of Germany just yet."

"What!" exclaimed Harding.

"Chester is right," Hal put in. "You see, Harding, we haven't yet obtained the information we came after."

"By Jove! So you haven't!" exclaimed Harding. "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Get it," returned Hal briefly.

Harding smiled.

"Easily said," he declared, "but, I am afraid, not so easily accomplished."

"If you'll listen to me I think I can suggest something," declared Chester.

"Fire away," said Hal.

"Well," began Chester, "in the first place we have a certain immunity now that we wear German uniforms. Hal and I speak German fluently, which will help. How about you, Harding?"

"Very little," was the reply. "English has always been good enough for me."

"Then we shall have to do the talking," said Chester. "You will have to be afflicted with an attack of dumbness, Harding."

"I can do that, all right. I'll just sit tight and say nothing."

"Good! Now my idea is this: We'll head for the front, bearing off a trifle to the south and thus dodging the Swiss border. We'll proceed as straight as possible to the German front in France. We'll trust to luck to get back to our own lines after we have learned at the front that which we desire."

"I don't call that much of a plan," said Harding. "There is no strategy there. Besides, we would just be putting our heads into the lion's mouth."

"Nevertheless," said Hal, "it is only in the midst of the German army that we can get the information we are after."

"That's probably true," said Harding. "Well, have it your own way and count on me to the finish."

"We'll just keep going, then," said Hal.

The big automobile began to pick up speed now and directly was dashing along at a rapid gait. From time to time they passed other cars on the road, but they were not stopped. The very audacity of the three friends augured toward their safety.

It was almost dark when Hal slowed down and stopped in front of a little hotel in a small village.

"We've got to have more gas and air," he explained, in response to Chester's questions. "Besides, the engine needs a drink. It's red hot."

"Also," said Harding in a low voice, "we could get away with a little grub."

"Right you are," said Hal. "We shall be able to satisfy all our needs here."

The three entered the hotel. The proprietor promised that the automobile should be looked after and ready within the hour and showed the three fugitives to a small dining-room at the far side of the building. The only occupant of the room at that moment proved to be a German colonel and the Englishman and the two American lads saluted him stiffly. The German returned the salute and continued his repast.

The fugitives ate heartily of the plain fare placed before them by their host. As Hal was draining his cup of the last drop of coffee, he became conscious that the German colonel was eyeing him. Suddenly the man kicked back his chair and approached the table at which the friends sat.

Hal felt of his revolver, for he smelled trouble. But he need not have worried—then.

"Where are you men going?" asked the colonel gruffly.

"To General von Mackensen, at the front, with dispatches," said Hal, mentioning the name of the first German general he thought of.

"So?" exclaimed the colonel. "I am going that way myself, also with dispatches. I find, however, that I shall have to remain here until morning unless I can commandeer a passing automobile."

Hal thought rapidly.

"I'll tell you, sir," he said at length, "we are going on to-night, and we shall be glad to have you accompany us, if you wish."

"I shall be glad," said the colonel. "When shall you start?"

"Immediately, sir."

"Good! I am ready."

Hal now introduced himself by a fictitious name; also his companions. The colonel owned up to the name of Reissler. Together the four left the hotel and returned to the automobile.

"If you will ride in front with me, I shall be honored, sir," said Hal to the colonel.

The lad had reason for this. He intended to do all the talking done by the fugitives. He felt certain that should the colonel ride with Harding and Chester he must certainly discover that Harding was

an imposter. Of Chester, however, he had no fear, for Chester's command of the German tongue was as perfect as Hal's own.

"Colonel," said Hal, as he started the car, "I have been long in the east and am not altogether familiar with the roads here. You will perhaps point out the shortest route as we go along?"

"Of course," said the colonel. "By the way," he added, "have you an idea of the nature of your dispatches?"

Hal hesitated. He could not be sure of his ground and he was at a loss what to say. However, he knew that the German colonel would require an answer, so he took a long chance.

"I am not exactly sure, sir," he replied, "but I believe that they have something to do with a possible retirement of our troops all along the western front."

The colonel looked at him sharply.

"You mean a realignment, sir?" he said sharply.

"Why, yes, sir," returned Hal.

The colonel's face lost its sternness.

"My understanding is similar to yours," he said. "We all know, of course, that our losses have been very heavy in the last few months—particularly in the last attempt to break through at Ypres. I'll tell you something," and he leaned forward, "had the Allied armies, reinforced as they have been by American troops, followed up our defeat there, we would have been compelled to fall back."

"Why, sir," said Hal, "this is news to me."

"So it is," returned the colonel. "Yet it's true."

Hal now became convinced of something he had begun to suspect since the moment the colonel became so talkative. The man had been drinking. In no other way could the lad account for his condescension in conversing with an officer beneath him in rank. Also, when the man leaned toward him, Hal could catch the odor of his breath.

"By Jove!" the lad told himself. "It may be that luck has turned our way at last. If I could get hold of those dispatches he carries I might learn something."

To the colonel he said:

"Are you on your way to General von Mackensen's quarters, sir?"

"I am," was the reply. "Now I'll tell you something more. Between the two of us, I am getting tired of this war; I wish it would come to an end. We know we can't win, you and I, and so does every member of the staff. Why, our ranks have been so depleted that it takes wonderful generalship to make the enemy believe we are still impregnable in our present positions."

"Is that so, sir?" said Hal. "I had no idea it was as bad as that."

"Only the other day," continued the colonel, "I chanced to be in Berlin. The emperor was there at the time, in conference with Generals Ludendorff,

von Mackensen and Hindenburg. I, as you know, am on von Mackensen's staff. Now let me tell you what I heard old Hindenburg himself say. 'Your Majesty,' said he, 'we've got to continue our attacks, for when we stop the enemy will begin his. By our attacks we must keep from him the fact that we could not resist an offensive on a large scale.' "

"Himmel! That does sound bad," said Hal.

"It does, indeed. Now, in my dispatches are contained practically those same words from Hindenburg—practically a repetition of the reasons he advanced at the conference, urging further attacks. Also I carry a description of the disposition of our troops and other material that Hindenburg hopes will convince von Mackensen that we must continue the offensive at all costs. Bad? I should say it is!"

Hal's heart leaped into his throat. Here was luck, indeed.

CHAPTER XXIII

THROUGH THE LINES

Hal turned the matter over in his mind. Should he make prisoner of this talkative German officer now or should he wait until later to appropriate the dispatches the man said he carried?

Hal decided to wait.

He did this for two reasons. First, the colonel's presence was useful right now in showing the road, and, second, he might come in handy should the party be stopped en route. So the lad decided to humor the man by continuing the conversation.

"It's too bad, sir," he said. "Why, I can remember in the early days of the war when the emperor figured on eating Christmas dinner in Paris. It's too bad, sir; too bad."

"So it is," agreed the colonel, "but personally, I'm getting tired of this business of killing. It's so useless, it seems to me."

"Those are bold words, sir," said Hal; "bold and not overly cautious, should they come to some ears."

"But you agree with me, don't you, captain?"

exclaimed the colonel, in some alarm. "I am talking now between friends, you know. Surely you will not repeat what I have just said?"

"Certainly I shall not repeat to any German officer what you have said," Hal declared truthfully.

At this moment the car rounded a sharp curve in the road. Ahead Hal saw the headlight of a machine drawn up in the middle of the road. It was impossible for the lad to drive around the second machine, so he brought his own car to a stop.

"Hope there is no trouble ahead," he told himself.

But, as it developed, there was trouble ahead.

Hal sprang from the car, as did Harding and Chester. The three realized that if there was trouble it would be better for them to stick together. The German colonel, however, leaned back in his seat, making no effort to move.

Half a dozen figures advanced toward the three fugitives, five privates and a lieutenant.

The lieutenant saluted Hal, who was in advance, as did the privates.

Hal returned the salute.

"What can I do for you, lieutenant?" he asked. "Machine in trouble?"

"No, sir. I'm guarding the road in the hope of picking up three prisoners who escaped from the camp at Villingen."

"I see," said Hal. "Word flashed ahead, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and it was deemed probable they would come along this road."

"I haven't seen anything of them en route," said Hal. "It may be that they are behind us. Wish you luck, lieutenant. Sorry I can't stay and have a hand in the capture, but I bear important dispatches and must be on my way. Will you please move your car to one side of the road?"

"Sorry, sir," said the lieutenant, "but I am instructed to examine carefully every one who passes."

"Oh, well, I suppose I can drive around you," said Hal, eyeing the side of the road.

"One moment, sir," said the lieutenant as Hal turned to move away. "I am satisfied with you, sir, but I must interrogate your companions. Remember, it is my duty, sir."

"Very well, then, lieutenant," said Hal. "Proceed, sir."

Chester approached and replied to the German's questions without hesitancy. Then Harding was forced to step forward.

One look at the big Englishman was enough for the German lieutenant. Nevertheless, he spoke in German.

"May I ask your name, Herr Captain?" he said.

Harding opened his mouth to reply, but at that moment Hal took prompt action. Stepping close to the German lieutenant, he shoved his revolver against the man's side and said quietly:

"Enough of this, sir. You will either order your men to move that automobile from across the road immediately, or I shall be compelled to fire."

The German's face turned a chalky white in the darkness, although this was not distinguishable. For a moment he hesitated, but Hal shoved the revolver more closely against him and the lieutenant gave the necessary command.

"Now Chester," said Hal, "you and Harding go back and get in the car, and whatever you do, make sure that our friend the colonel doesn't get out. He's a jewel of rare value, Chester, and we can't afford to lose him. Do you understand?"

"You bet," was Chester's reply, as he and Harding turned and ran for the car.

The German colonel was about to alight as Chester and Harding dashed back.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Nothing serious, sir," said Chester. "Please get back in the car."

"Wait a moment now," protested the colonel. "Guess I'll have a look ahead first."

"Get back in that car!" said Chester in a stern voice.

"Look here!" exclaimed the colonel. "How dare you talk like that to your superior officer? You shall be disciplined, sir."

"No time for words," said Harding in English at that moment.

He ran in suddenly and seized the colonel from behind. In spite of the latter's frantic struggles, the Englishman lifted him into the tonneau and held him as he climbed in himself. Chester also jumped in and showed a revolver, which he pressed close to the colonel's head.

"One word and you are a dead man!" said the lad quietly.

Hal, still guarding the German lieutenant closely, saw the German privates move the machine and open the road.

"Now, lieutenant," he said, "you'll accompany me back to my own car, first ordering your men to stand one side."

The lieutenant gave the necessary order and preceded Hal back to the other car.

"One more thing, lieutenant," said Hal, as he placed his foot on the step prepared to leap in, "if you make an outcry before we have passed your men yonder, some of them will get hurt. Take my advice and keep still."

Hal lowered his revolver slowly until it pointed at the German's feet. Then he pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a report and the German lieutenant skipped nimbly back as the bullet kicked up the dust about him. He was not wounded, nor had Hal intended that he should be. The lad's act was simply a ruse to get a little start.

The moment he fired his revolver Hal leaped into

the car, slammed the door behind him and sent the machine forward with a lurch.

From behind came an angry hail from the lieutenant and his revolver cracked. But the bullets went wild.

The lieutenant's action, however, had served his purpose. It alarmed the soldiers ahead, who, seeing the automobile bearing down on them, cried loud commands to halt.

But the car kept on.

"Duck!" cried Hal, and suited the action to the word.

The occupants of the tonneau also ducked their heads out of harm's way even as the German soldiers fired a volley from their rifles. Before they could fire again, however, the car was far down the road, and a moment later it disappeared around a sharp curve.

"There'll be pursuit, Chester!" shouted Hal. "Rifle the pockets of our friend the colonel and climb in the front seat here with whatever you can find."

Chester needed no further instructions.

In spite of the protests and struggles of the German colonel, Chester went through his pockets systematically and thoroughly.

"Now you guard him, Harding," the lad said.

"I'll guard him all right," said Harding grimly. "I'll toss him overboard at the first sign of trouble."

The German appeared to understand the words.

Chester climbed into the front seat with some difficulty because of the lurching of the car as it sped along. In a few words Hal told him of the dispatches the colonel had carried.

"If he had 'em, I've got 'em now," said Chester grimly. "I took everything he had."

"We can't stop to see now," said Hal. "You climb back and tell him we are figuring on him to show us the way to the front direct. If he refuses or plays false, tell him you'll shoot him."

Chester clambered back into the tonneau again.

"I agree!" shouted the colonel when Chester told him what he would be expected to do. "And I'll do better than that. I don't want to fight any more. I'm tired of it. I am your prisoner, sir, and I wish to be taken into your lines as such."

"That sounds pretty fishy to me," said Chester.

"But it is true," protested the German, "and I will show you the way through the German lines."

There was something so apparently sincere in the German's words, that Chester climbed back and again held counsel with Hal. The result of this was that the German colonel was transferred to the front seat, and Chester sat close behind him with a revolver at his back.

It was hours later that the automobile came within sight of the huge German army encampment. Hal was now forced to slow down.

But the party was not molested as the car proceeded through the heart of the encampment, Hal following the directions of the German colonel.

"Now," said the colonel, pointing, "if you will follow that road, it will take us to the front line, where, by a dash, we shall be able to pass the last outposts."

Hal followed the directions. Ten minutes later a German sentinel cried a command to halt, but Hal sent the car forward faster. There came a sharp report from behind, but the bullet went wild.

Ten minutes later there came another command to halt. But this command came in English.

Hal brought the car to a quick stop and climbed out.

"Safe at last," he cried to Chester and Harding. "And now for General Pershing and the drive that will push the Germans back forever!"

CHAPTER XXIV

PROMOTION

As Hal jumped from the automobile, he found his way barred by a British sentinel.

"It's all right; we're friends," he said.

The Briton eyed Hal and his German uniform dubiously.

"You may be," he said, "but the uniform you wear doesn't look much like it."

Hal laughed.

"We are friends nevertheless," he said. "Take us to your colonel and we'll convince him soon enough."

"Well," said the Tommy, "you may be. I've seen some queer things in this war so I'll not dispute you. But I'll take my oath that man," and he pointed to the German colonel, "is a German."

"You're right, my man," said Hal, "but he comes as a prisoner."

"And you'll all go to the colonel as prisoners," declared the sentinel. He raised his voice in a shout: "Hey, sergeant!"

A British sergeant came forward at a run.

"What's the matter, Smith?" he demanded.

"Four chaps here in German uniforms and three of 'em say they belong to our army," said Smith.

The sergeant looked the four over. As his eyes fell on Harding he started.

"I'll take my oath it's Harding!" he exclaimed, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Right you are, sergeant," said Harding. "How do you like my new uniform?"

"Fine, if you killed a Boche to get it," the sergeant made reply. He turned to the colonel. "I'll be responsible for these men, Smith," he said.

The private walked away.

Harding explained the situation to the sergeant in a few words, leaving out, however, all reference to the lads' mission.

"I'll wake the colonel myself," said the sergeant, "if you say you must be on your way at once."

"We must, sergeant," said Chester.

"Very well then; follow me, but you there, Mr. Fritz, walk ahead and remember I've got my gun ready and would be glad to use it."

In this manner they reached the quarters of the British regimental commander, who received Hal and Chester immediately when he learned that there was need of haste.

"We carry dispatches for General Pershing, sir," said Hal, "and we would like to be on our way at

once. Otherwise we would not have disturbed you at this hour."

"Your names?" asked the colonel.

Chester told him.

"Very well," said the colonel. "I shall get in touch with General Pershing immediately by telephone. In the meantime, you must remain here."

The colonel summoned his orderly and gave the necessary instructions.

Harding, meantime, had gone away with his friend the top sergeant, who also had volunteered to take care of the German officer. The boys had promised Harding that they would see him again before they left. He had announced his intention of joining his own regiment.

It was several hours later—after daylight—when the British colonel informed the lads that they were at liberty to depart.

"I have satisfied myself of your identity," he told them.

"I wonder, sir," said Hal, "if you could supply us with more appropriate clothing than these German uniforms?"

"I think I can," he replied. "It's true you wouldn't make much progress in our lines with those uniforms. Also I can furnish you a British army automobile, which will help."

"Thank you, sir," said Hal.

Half an hour later they were attired in regula-

tion British uniforms and stood talking to Harding just before they made ready to climb into the automobile to continue their journey.

"I am certainly glad we ran across you, Harding," said Hal as the two shook hands.

"No more than I am to have been with you both, sir," said Harding. "I wish you luck in the matter you told me of and I feel that the offensive now will not be long coming. In the meantime, however, in accord with your wishes, I shall say nothing."

"I am sure it will be better that way," said Hal. "Well, we'll see you again some time. Good-bye."

Chester also bade the Englishman farewell and the two boys climbed into the machine. The car sped forward.

It was a long distance to General Pershing's headquarters in Soissons from the point where Hal and Chester had re-entered the Allied lines, and Hal knew that he could not hope to cover the distance before dark. Nevertheless, he kept the car going at a fair speed all during the day.

The lads made only two stops, both times to replenish their gasoline tank, but it was well after eight o'clock that evening when they came to the outskirts of Soissons.

Hal slowed down the car.

"Well, we'll soon be there," he said.

"And I'll be glad of it," declared Chester. "It's been quite an eventful trip and we've learned a few

things about the enemy that we didn't know before."

"Right," said Hal. "By the way, did you examine the papers we took from the German to make sure that they were what he said?"

"Yes. I have the dispatch, and it is as he represented it to be. I made sure of that, all right."

"Good; then our mission has been successful."

"It has if Marshal Foch lives up to his word," said Chester.

"He'll do that, all right. You heard him make the promise, didn't you?"

"Yes; but maybe he'll say this is not sufficient proof."

"He can't very well, to my mind. Hello, here we are!"

The car came to a pause in front of the villa occupied by General Pershing. The two lads climbed out.

As they would have ascended the steps, they were stopped by an American sentry.

"Have word sent to General Pershing that Lieutenants Paine and Crawford are here to report," said Hal.

The man passed the word to a second sentinel, who entered the building. He was back in a few moments.

"The general directs that you come to him immediately," he said.

Hal and Chester mounted the steps rapidly, passed through the long hall and entered General Pershing's private office.

General Pershing stood close to the door as the lads entered, and there was an expression of eagerness on his face. The lads saluted.

"What luck?" demanded the American commander-in-chief.

"The best, sir," replied Hal quietly.

"Good!" thundered the American commander. "I knew you would do it. Now tell me what you have learned."

Hal related the incidents leading up to the seizure of the German officer's dispatches as briefly as possible and Chester passed over the papers.

General Pershing hurried to his desk and beneath the glow of his desk light ran through the papers quickly. A smile stole over his features.

"It is enough," he said, getting to his feet again.

The lads flushed with pleasure.

"Captain Paine, Captain Crawford," said General Pershing. "I congratulate you both. You have done well."

Hal and Chester started at the title of "captain" and Hal would have spoken. But General Pershing stayed him with a gesture.

"Your promotions I made out before you started," he said simply. "It would have been no disgrace had you failed. I understand you were captains in

the British army before you resigned to go to America and fight for Old Glory. Surely your own country is bound to treat you as well as England."

The faces of both boys were red and they fidgeted nervously. The praise of their general pleased them, but they would rather have done without it.

"Thank you, sir," muttered Hal.

Chester also stammered his gratitude.

"I will say this much more," continued General Pershing; "You are young for captains, it is true, but if before the war is over you do not rank still higher I am a bad prophet."

Again the lads stammered their thanks.

"Never mind the thanks, sirs," said General Pershing. "I have bestowed no favor. You have won your promotions on your merits. Now leave me, for I have work to do. Report to Colonel Gibson, who will find quarters for you for the night. I shall send for you to-morrow. Good night, sirs."

General Pershing stepped toward them and extended his hand to each in turn.

Hal and Chester stopped at the door long enough to salute, and then left the room. They found Colonel Gibson without difficulty and that officer immediately dispatched an orderly to find them quarters.

"Now," said Hal, when they were comfortably installed half an hour later, "I intend to sleep until General Pershing sends for me to-morrow."

"And I," agreed Chester. "I don't feel as if I

had had a good sleep for a month. And I'll bet we won't get much more sleep, either."

"Why?" demanded Hal.

"Why?" echoed Chester. "Why, because an advance will be ordered soon and then there won't be time to sleep."

"It may not come for some weeks yet," Hal demurred. "Those things take time, you know."

"I know that," Chester admitted, "but I'll bet General Pershing won't let any grass grow under his feet."

"Trouble is, it's not up to him entirely," said Hal.

"Maybe not," declared Chester, "but if Marshal Foch doesn't act on this information, General Pershing is likely to act himself."

"And if he doesn't," laughed Hal, "one of our divisional commanders is likely to do it in the heat of excitement."

And that is exactly what happened.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MARINES MOVE FORWARD

"CHESTER," said Hal, "that is the finest looking body of men I have ever seen."

Hal eyed the long lines of marines with pride and a critical eye.

"Right you are, Hal," Chester agreed. I'll bet they make the Germans sit up and take notice." He turned to Bowers. "You are to be congratulated on being a part of such an outfit, sergeant," he added.

"Thank you, sir," said Bowers.

"And we're in luck to have been detailed here at this time," said Hal.

"You're right again," declared Chester.

It was three days after Hal and Chester had returned from their mission for General Pershing. Soon after the American commander had communicated to Marshal Foch the results of the lads' work, he had ordered them south to General Bundy's two divisions of marines, which for several days had been encamped some distance from the

front. The lads had delivered dispatches from the American commander-in-chief to General Bundy and had been detailed to the Sixth Regiment. There, much to their surprise, they encountered their old friends, Lieutenants Smith and Jenkins, and Bowers, who had been promoted to a top sergeancy.

All were delighted with the reunion and the marines expressed their satisfaction when they learned Hal and Chester had been promoted.

"It's probably a bit irregular to have you with us, sir," Sergeant Bowers said to Hal, "but we're glad you're here."

"I'll tell you something, sergeant," said Hal, with a knowing wink. "It will be only a matter of hours now until we move to the front."

"Is that so, sir?" asked Bowers. "Well, it can't be too soon for me. I've had one crack at these Huns, but up to date the marines haven't been in sufficient strength to show what we can do. But," and his eyes swept the large encampment, "there are enough of us here to run Fritz to death if they give us a chance."

"Practically eighteen thousand men," Chester agreed.

"Let's hope we get another crack at them soon, sir," said Bowers.

The chance was to come sooner than even Hal or Chester had believed possible.

It was on the evening of June 15 that the ma-

rines suddenly received orders to march. This was the day following the arrival of Hal and Chester at General Bundy's headquarters.

The lads had been much impressed with General Bundy upon sight; and he was not to lose caste in their eyes; for, as it developed, here was the man who was to be mainly responsible for the launching of the great Allied offensive.

General Omar Bundy was tall and spare and was chiefly distinguishable by a rather prominent mustache. He was a capable officer and a man prone to prompt decision, as he was to prove.

Hard upon the orders to move forward, the marines vaulted into camions, or French motor trucks. These vehicles found great favor in their eyes. The springs are so staunch and stiff, the hard seats are so dependable, and their capacity is so blindly ignored when they are loaded that the soldiers had many a laugh.

Although they had had no supper, there was quite a lot of singing as the troops embarked.

All night long the trucks bumped over the traffic-torn roads. When dawn peeped above the purple horizon they pulled into a little French village and the men jumped from the tracks. They were hungry and thirsty.

Up to this time the men had not thought much about their destination, but as the roar of the guns at the front became louder and louder they began to

realize that there was serious work ahead. In spite of their growing thirst and the emptiness in their stomachs, however, there was not a murmur of protest in the ranks.

A division cannot be moved over one road and expect to reach its destination in proper formation —and there were two divisions moving here. All the roads leading to the destination must be utilized, and even then some parts of the division will be dumped many kilometers from their destination.

So the troops hiked and hiked till the roads beneath them rose in dusty protest at the ceaseless tramp, tramp.

In the afternoon the regiment to which Hal and Chester were attached struck through a deep wood. The trees were magnificent. All the underbrush had been cleared out. It was replaced by shells. Acres on acres were piled high with shells of every calibre. Most of them were made in America, and the troops cheered as they recognized the trade marks.

Around the edges of this stupendous mountain of death there was a feverish activity, a subdued excitement that boded ill. American and French ammunition trains came tearing, galloping, whirling in dust-clouds ahead of smoking exhausts—into that trembling woods. With seeming recklessness shells were tossed into the wagons and camions, which departed with fresh haste.

A flood of giant trucks streamed into the woods, dumped their loads of ammunition and whirled away for more. The marines tightened their belts and decided to stick around. There was something doing!

Finally the marines emerged onto the main road. And what a road! It was a nightmare, a thousand bedlams. There was noise, noise and more noise. It was a Niagara of sound that deafened the men.

The shouting of the workers, the crunch and grind of wheels, the groan of gears, the cracking of whips, the clang of metal, the pounding of countless horses' hoofs, the chugging of streams of motors and the screams of their many-throated sirens; empty ammunition trains going and loaded ones coming, light artillery and heavy artillery, tanks in platoons, trucks in companies, field kitchens, water wagons, supply trains, ration carts, all fought for space and air in order to make their own particular noise vibrate. Every square foot of that road, broad and gummy-surfaced, supported something all the time, while the ditches on either side were used by endless lines of plodding Americans, faint from hunger and thirst, almost exhausted from want of sleep, but all thrilled by the hunger for Huns that would only be satisfied by victory and peace.

The marines were about to strike the enemy and they knew it. Marshal Foch was behind them.

So they plodded on and on without complaint.

The road with its babel of streaming traffic told them that something was about to happen. And each man secretly congratulated himself on being considered good enough to have a part in the show.

Toward the evening it was pure agony for most of the men to pass a French kitchen, located in the woods that flanked both sides of the woods. The men took to robbing the water wagons as they passed. French drivers, angered, slashed at them with their whips, but the marines didn't mind.

Looking back along the road, Sergeant Bowers saw a young marine with a loaf of French bread. The sergeant stepped out of line and waited for him. In the presence of that loaf of bread, the sergeant actually trembled.

"Where'd you get it?" demanded the sergeant of the young marine.

"Frenchman, for the 'makin's,'" returned the youngster.

Instantly the sergeant turned his eyes to the side of the road, where for the first time he noted the presence, at irregular intervals, of French soldiers, most of them slightly wounded, some of whom carried loaves of bread. Sergeant Bowers approached one and exposed a sack half full of tobacco.

"For one loaf," he said to a Frenchman near him.

Without haggling, the man passed the loaf of bread to the sergeant and the latter gave him his tobacco.

"Pretty high," said the sergeant to himself, "but I've just naturally got to have something to eat."

Congestion soon halted the line as the Americans advanced. Lured on by Sergeant Bowers' action, hundreds of privates were able to make exchanges with French soldiers, and it took sharp orders from the officers to make them move on again.

Every now and then the marines came to a place where a shell had exploded in the road recently. At one place they came upon what had been five horses, and a part of another, and some blue helmets. These were dragged aside hastily.

Around 5 o'clock, Hal, who had gone to headquarters in a commandeered automobile, rejoined his regiment, which soon stopped for a rest. Sergeant Bowers dropped down in the ditch and eased his pack straps from the spots that ached. Hal went over to him.

"Sergeant," said the lad, "have the men got emergency rations?"

"No, sir," said Bowers.

"What?" exclaimed Hal. "Why haven't they? Major Drew told me they had."

"Well, they haven't, sir," repeated Bowers dryly. "I can vouch for that. I've had to pull up my belt a couple of notches."

"Now, that's pretty tough," declared Hal. "But I am afraid it can't be helped now, sergeant."

"Right you are, sir. I don't hear any kicking."

Hal smiled in spite of himself.

After a brief rest, the marines resumed their journey. They struck out along a quieter road. They hiked and hiked till their shoes quit squeaking. The road gradually became deserted. Soon the marching marines were the only men in sight.

The men zig-zagged from side to side, ducking trees cut off by big shells. Suddenly the vanguard was confronted by a gesticulating Frenchman, who waved his hands for them to stop. Hal halted his company and rode forward.

"What's the matter?" he demanded in French.

The Frenchman pointed dramatically along the road.

"Boche!"

"What?" queried Hal. *"Com bien kilometers?"* (How many kilometers?)

"Non. Non!" returned the Frenchman. "Kilometer!"

Hal thanked the Frenchman and discreetly ordered his men into a woods. The withdrawal was assisted by five German shells that burst on both sides of the road.

"Just in time, sir," said Bowers.

"Right," replied Hal, "thanks to the Frenchman."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

A RUNNER found Major Drew and delivered an order to dig in.

Meanwhile, darkness had blotted out all but the trees, and between the bark of the "heavies" (heavy artillery), the marines caught the deep-throated roll of thunder. A soldier who has had two months of open work or outdoor warfare, in which artillery had played the leading rôle, has to be very tired to ignore an order to dig in a scant kilometer back of the first line, the worst spot on the field.

The marines dug in.

When nature's storm broke the troops meekly rolled up in their ponchos, dropped to the ground and asleep. The closing misery of that day came in the shape of rain. But it did not keep the tired marines awake.

Before dawn next morning, the troops were up, standing by, awaiting the barrage. The last tanks that had found shelter in the woods the preceding day had trundled away before dawn. Nothing was

now left to divert the attention of the men from gnawing stomachs. The men tightened their belts again and tried to concentrate on the work to come.

At four-thirty o'clock in the morning there was an explosion. It never wavered. It lasted for hours without interruption. The earth shook up and down and sideways. The very foundation of the Teutonic dynasties must have trembled. It shook the leaves off the trees.

Forgotten were parched throats and empty stomachs. The troops fairly revelled in the cannonading, for they felt that they would soon have a hand in the fight.

Two hours later, the guns still thundering, the marines started up the road on which the Frenchman had flagged Hal the night before. A hundred yards beyond where he had encountered the marines lay a dead German. Near him was a machine gun placed to command that road.

This road was a replica of other roads. If anything, the congestion was worse than it had been the day before.

Huge trees, uprooted by giant shells, required detours while the engineers worked like beavers to clear away the massive tops. Reserve tanks and artillery lined either side of the road. Ambulances now mixed with the various wagons of war.

Weaving in and out through the traffic came the walking wounded; Germans bearing improvised

stretchers and batches of from ten to twenty prisoners. The air was peopled with aeroplanes. The sharp chatter of machine guns occasionally rose above the rumble of the artillery.

In their first encounter of any moment with the Boche the marines learned many things. They learned that the German infantry had a horror of hand-to-hand fighting, and would run or surrender rather than try such combat. They learned that the sole protection of the Boche artillery lay in the effectiveness of front-line machine guns and its own accuracy. They came to believe the backbone of the German infantry was its artillery. Such a situation in any army, they knew, must have a demoralizing effect. The infantry should be the backbone of the artillery.

Meantime the American battalion to which Hal and Chester were attached took up a position at the edge of the woods and awaited orders. After the first excitement had passed, the attention of the troops fell back to their empty stomachs. They counted again the hours since their last meal. They totalled forty-two. For that many years, it seemed, they had been without food, sleep and water rations, and had worked as men had never worked before.

Then the miracle happened. A big truck drew up by the roadside and began to dump boxes—boxes of canned beef, tomatoes, prunes and bread. Fifteen minutes later there were a thousand happy ma-

rines in that section, ravenously gulping down a real "feed" and quenching their thirst.

But war considers no man's pleasure. In the midst of the feast came the rattle and clatter of machine guns, temporarily acting as aerial defense.

Came sweeping down from the sky four aeroplanes, directly over where Hal and Chester stood conversing.

"The Iron Cross!" cried Sergeant Bowers.

Under the command of their officers, the men grabbed their rifles.

"Hold on!" cried one, as the men were about to fire at the nearest machine. "It's a Frenchman."

It was true, but it became apparent a moment later that there still would be need for weapons, for in the wake of the French craft followed three German machines.

Points in aerial battle at close range come and go too quickly for recognition almost.

The clever Frenchman was outwitting the Boche pilot. The four planes whirled directly over the heads of the marines, a hundred feet from the ground, the Frenchman a few yards ahead and lowest. They cleared the tops of the trees and circled over a field ahead. The Boches poured lead upon the handicapped Frenchman, who desperately turned the nose of his craft upward. The Germans must have been looking for such a move. They elevated and closed in on him.

A fierce battle of machine guns; a plane dropped nose foremost. Straight down it came, then—within twenty feet of the ground—the French pilot, with superb daring, jerked his machine to a level keel and sailed off, clipping the heads off the grain.

The German machines hovered over the spot where it seemed the French pilot must meet disaster, and the marines opened fire on them with their rifles. Each time the Germans approached closer, they were driven off, for it was certain that an American bullet sooner or later must find a vital spot.

The German machines turned and made off.

Now came orders for the marines to dig in. Soon every man had a hole. Later in the day these holes were abandoned and the marines marched to positions nearer the front line.

Hal's detachment came to a crossroad and turned to the right. From there the lad could see the broad expanse of country beyond. It was all fields of waving grain, streams of men, of horses and artillery.

They cut across an enormous field of wheat. On their right lay a French plane, apparently none the worse for its adventure. To the left lay a big German plane. Beside it were the bodies of two men—the pilot and the gunner.

"Here they come!" shouted Sergeant Bowers suddenly.

Hal looked ahead and saw a column of men—

Germans—marching toward the Americans four abreast.

Apparently there was no end to that column. At least twenty officers were at the head of it. They appeared to be the happiest men in sight, and well they might be, for for them the days of war were over. They were prisoners.

The marines moved forward again.

They passed a line of batteries, famous French "75's," pounding, pounding. Over the country ahead, Hal counted five hangars, or what had been aeroplane hangars. Now they were grotesquely twisted steel skeletons, deserted by the enemy. The troops passed through a small village, into another wheat field, formed for attack, and halted.

They occupied a knoll. On the slope below was a line of queer looking dots. In the hollow proper were three "75" batteries. Up to the left were still more batteries. Hal searched the landscape with his eyes carefully. Ahead he saw his target.

It was on the farthest hill. The last rays of the sun outlined it clearly. It was the long line of tanks, which the Huns had brought into the fight as substitutes, their artillery having been captured. When Hal first sighted them they were spitting fire from their one-pounders and they were moving.

Half an hour later, under the fire from Americans and French, they were in ruins, and through glasses Hal and Chester saw the German infantry

retiring past them. The French and American batteries rested.

"Now," said Hal to Chester, "if you ask me, here is where we should continue our advance."

Chester shrugged.

"It seems that Marshal Foch has not decided yet that the time for an offensive is ripe," he replied. "At the same time, I am not convinced that we should attack right now. The two divisions of marines are somewhat scattered, as you know, and are not in position to give each other the necessary support. Then, too, we must be greatly outnumbered."

"What difference does that make?" Hal wanted to know. "They're running now, aren't they? What's the matter with pushing them a little faster?"

Chester smiled.

"I'm going to recommend you as General Pershing's successor," he said.

"Is that so?" demanded Hal. "Let me tell you that it wasn't so long ago I heard you advance ideas that you believed were better than any that had occurred to the general staff."

Chester grinned.

"I guess we'll both make a couple of good generals some day," he said. "But all joking aside, do you know just where we are now?"

"Well, about," said Hal. "This is Belleau Woods. Beyond there," and the lad pointed directly ahead,

"is what is known as Chateau Thierry. A city has sprung up around the old chateau, but I don't know whether the Germans have left anything of it. It was rather a famous spot in its day."

And it was to become still more famous, though neither lad knew it then.

CHAPTER XXVII

BUNDY'S FAMOUS MESSAGE

It was the morning of the seventeenth of June. All night the duel of great guns had raged over Belleau Woods and to the north and the south.

With the coming of daylight, the Germans charged the combined French and American troops that held that part of the field. Fighting desperately, the Allied armies were forced to fall back in the face of superior numbers and a terrific rain of machine gun and artillery fire.

On the Allied right flank and again on the left flank the retirement of French troops began to take on the form of a disorderly retreat. It seemed that the day was lost.

Suddenly, in the early morning, there came pushing through the retreating French forces, a body of men in khaki, in perfect formation. Behind them came others.

General Bordeau, the French divisional commander, eyed them in surprise. Hastily he dispatched a courier to the American commander, Gen-

eral Omar Bundy. The courier made the journey quickly. General Bundy received him at once.

"General Bordeau advises that you fall back at once, sir," said the courier. "It is folly to advance in the face of utter annihilation."

General Bundy got slowly to his feet. His face was stern and his eyes flashed as he delivered his now famous message.

"We regret, sir," said he, "that we are unable to follow the counsels of our masters the French, but the American flag has been compelled to retire. This is unendurable, and none of our soldiers would understand not being asked to do whatever is necessary to reëstablish a situation which is humiliating to us and unacceptable to our country's honor. We are going to counter attack!"

And counter attack the Americans did, led by the marines, with a result that the whole world knows.

That the reader may be better able to understand the situation, it will be well to go back a ways and tell in more detail of events leading up to the presence of the marines in Belleau Woods.

After having been drilled all summer, the regiment of marines which had come with the first convoy in June, was withdrawn from the First Division. Although this was most depressing to every officer and man, in that it meant that they would not be among the first in the trenches, the service to which they were assigned was in one sense a com-

pliment to qualities which are as inseparable from them as their gallantry.

The marines have traditions, associated with ship's orderliness, which are kept up by competent, veteran non-commissioned officers, that make them models in soldierly deportment.

After the withdrawal of the marines, the First Division was brought up to full strength as a complete regular division composed of the Sixteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-sixth and Twenty-eighth Regiments of infantry and the first artillery brigade, of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh artillery regiments.

On the third of June the German confined his attacks for the most part northward of the section held by the marines, but was feeding in machine gun groups with a view to future mischief. On the early morning of the fourth, the marines took over from the French a twelve-mile front, with the Third brigade, holding the Fourth from its left to the west of Belleau Woods. The Twenty-Third Regiment, and the marine battalion and the Fifth Machine Gun Battalion, which had been sent to fill the gap at Colombs, were returned to the division, which now held the sector alone.

The marines now held twelve miles of battleline with no reserves between them and the Marne.

From Hill 204 all the way to the American right the Germans had the advantage of observation.

The country is uneven, with many woods and the

usual open fields between woods and villages. In front of the marines the Germans held the important tactical point of the village of Bouresches and the railroad station, and they had filtered into the adjoining Belleau Woods and around it as an ideal cover for machine-gun nests. This Bouresches-Belleau line was excellent for the purpose of the enemy if they were to stabilize their positions and cease to advance, or as a jumping-off place for continuing their offensive.

The spirit of rivalry between the Third (a regular brigade) and the Fourth (the marines) was very pronounced. Marine officers might not have had the schooling in tactics of the regulars, but being plain infantrymen, they considered at least that they were not afraid to fight.

The honor and future of the marine corps were at stake there before Belleau Woods and Bouresches. There had been people who had said the marine corps should be eliminated from the armed forces of the United States. The marines soon were to prove themselves.

On the Fourth of June, the first day they were in the front line, the marines had repulsed a German attack. At dawn on the morning of the Sixth, the second day after they were in the line, they made an attack in conjunction with the French on the left to rectify the line in the direction of Torcy; and they went through machine-gun fire and shell fire to their objectives all according to pattern.

According to General Bundy's ideas, the way to act in an active sector was to be active, that is why the marines were enabled to make history at Belleau Woods, which battle included the fight at Chateau Thierry.

It was before noon on the seventeenth of June. Straggling figures came around a bend in the road near Meaux—they were French, the advance guards of the retreating columns that were to follow.

Folks from the nearby villages crowded the roadside with tears in their eyes as they watched their own French soldiers going back and back. It meant the Germans were coming on toward Paris!

Slowly it dawned on those French civilians that American marines, which now were seen approaching, were going ahead to fill the gap—to take the place left by their own poilus. The word passed quickly down the roadside. Girls and women ran forward with poppies and other blossoms and pressed them into the hands of the marines. Their gratitude was pathetic—it impeded the regular line of march, at first, but after the marines passed, every man was filled with a determination to make good.

The marines had marched about half an hour when Hal and Chester came across a sight they will never forget—a long line of stumbling, pitiful refugees.

A man behind Hal said two or three times to himself:

"Confound 'em!" and there was a murmured re-echo down the line.

"Quiet back there!" the platoon leader shouted, but there was a bit of sympathy in the command.

German shells began to fall near the road, thicker and thicker. They were feeling their way with artillery for the advance that was to follow. Not so many kilometers more, and their shells would be falling on Paris, the German staff thought.

Then came the orders to dig in, and the marines fell to.

They had no time to dig anything but individual rifle pits that June day, before they got their first chance to give "Fritz" a taste of the unexpected. With their bayonets and mess gear they scraped shallow holes in the ground, and along that afternoon the Germans marched confidently out of the woods, across the green wheatfield, in two perfect columns.

Then the marines opened fire.

Hardly a marine in that regiment, and other regiments behind—in fact hardly a man in the two divisions of marines that soon were to battle desperately, hand-to-hand, with the Germans, that did not boast a "marksman's badge"; many were qualified as sharpshooters and expert riflemen. These men did not simply raise their rifles and shoot in the general direction of Germany. They adjusted their sights, coolly took aim and shot to kill. The Prussians

dropped as if death was wielding a scythe in their midst, rank after rank.

Then the flower of the German army broke ranks and took refuge in the woods. But the impudence of the Americans could not be allowed to go unpunished. The Germans whipped and slashed that field of waist-high wheat with such a concentrated machine-gun fire as neither Hal nor Chester ever expected to encounter again.

But once again the unexpected.

Wave after wave of marines rose up in perfect alignment and charged!

Foolhardy? Of course. The marines dropped in twos, threes and fours, but they advanced. Whole platoons were wiped out, but the waves never broke.

At a certain point, say books on tactics, the remnants of decimated forces must waver, give way and retire. Never were ranks cut up so before, perhaps, but the book of tactics went awry when those American youngsters charged! Handfulls of them reached the trees and put the Boche to flight. Then they entrenched at the edge of the woods.

But the end was not yet. The advance of the marines continued through the woods.

At the very outset they met machine-gun fire; and out of the wood, after they were in it, came the persistent rattle of rifle fire, varied by veritable storms of machine-gun fire. Wounded began to flow back

from the ravines. Calls came for Stokes' mortars from the hidden scene of that vicious medley, along with the report that Colonel Catlin had been wounded half an hour after the attack began.

Machine-gun positions in the outskirts of the woods had been taken; but they were only the first lot. Hal had been through many woods where German machine gunners ensconced themselves, and none that he remembered afforded better positions for defense against any enemy.

Not only was the undergrowth advantageous, but there were numerous rocks and ravines and pockets, all of which favored the Germans. There was nothing new in the system which the enemy applied, but not until troops go against it for the first time do they realize its character.

When they could locate a gun, the marines concentrated their rifles upon it. The wounded crawled back behind rocks or into ravines, or to any place where they could find a dead space. Hot cries accompanied the flashing drives of the cold steel through the underbrush. Many bayonets might drop from the hands of the men who were hit, but some bayonets would "get there."

Hal, stopping to get his breath, found time to say to Chester, who was near him:

"Hot work, old man; but we're going through!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHATEAU THIERRY

THAT was the thing—to get there!

The marines have always fought in that way. It is tradition—and their nature.

German gunners ran from their guns in face of such assaults; others tried to withdraw their guns; still others were taken in groups huddled in ravines as youth, fearful in its white rage of determination, bore down upon them and gathered them in, or, again, drove the bayonet home into gunners who stuck to their posts until the instant that forms, with eyes gleaming, leapt upon them.

With captured German machine guns, men, whom the marines farther back could not reach with food and water, held their gains, taking food and water from the American and German dead.

Although the first phase of the attack had not been fully accomplished, it was determined not to hold back the other companies, which had been waiting under shell fire that only aroused their eagerness to advance, from undertaking the second phase.

Theirs was a simpler task than that of their comrades who had stormed the woods. Artillery preparation in clearing away was, of course, more serviceable against a village than against a woods, and neither machine gun nor shell fire delayed the precision of the movement across the open to the village of Chateau Thierry itself.

But the enemy contested every step of the advance. These troops that the German general staff now hurled forward to stem the tide of the American advance were the flower of the emperor's army —the Prussian Guards, who boasted that they had never been stopped.

But not only were they to be stopped by the impetuous daring of the Americans, but they were soon to be driven back in utter rout.

In the woods the marines were cheek by jowl with the enemy, who were slipping more machine guns into that section of the wood.

The Germans must be made to understand that the woods was the property of the Americans—that was the thought in the hearts of all the marines as they went about their work, while the Germans, on their part, began gassing the approaches both of Chateau Thierry and Belleau village.

The very irregular shape of Belleau Woods, no less than the character of the ground, favored the defenders in forming cross zones of fire. It was a strange and fierce business, there in the dense

brush, where men of the same squad could not keep in touch with one another at times. Happily the marines had located some of the enemy nests before they attacked, but those farther ahead they could locate only when the Germans began firing, or when they stumbled upon gunners who were still hugging cover after the bombardment, or who simply had concluded it was better to be a live prisoner than to die for the Kaiser.

They were taken in groups and singly, taken standing behind trees and hugging the holes they had dug in the earth. Some were trying to retreat with their guns; others fled precipitately, and many continued to work their guns.

It was a hunt of man-hornet nests, with khaki the hunter and the German gray the hunted. The marines fought even more fiercely than in their first attack. They wanted to finish the job this time; and the job was to be finished soon.

The enemy, smarting under the American success, began bringing up reserves and concentrated a terrific artillery fire on the ground close to Chateau Thierry and the village itself. Chateau Thierry seemed to have become a point of honor with the Germans no less than with the Americans. They saturated it with a bombardment of yperite gas, which clings to the earth and the trees, and burns flesh that comes in contact with it.

As the Germans could hardly send their own men

into this area to suffer the effects intended for the marines, the battle momentarily died down.

But it was to be resumed shortly with redoubled fury.

An hour later the Germans, with their reserves, made an attack in force. By all criterions this attack should have succeeded. Some Germans penetrated to within a short distance of the American lines and a good many of them remained there—dead.

American machine-gun fire and rifle fire drove all who escaped back toward the enemy's lines. At the same time, under cover of their artillery, the Germans had reinforced their machine-gun units, which remained in the edge of the woods, probably thinking that as soon as the effects of the yperite were over, recovery of the woods would not be difficult.

But the German staff was doomed to disappointment.

For perhaps half an hour the battle died down again. The Germans took advantage of this lull to reform their lines just beyond Chateau Thierry and to prepare to repel an attack.

From this moment the German staff seems to have lost all desire of an offensive movement. They must have realized that the possibility of a further advance had gone a-glimmering with the defeat of the Prussian Guard in Belleau Woods. No longer

would the Germans be the aggressors; it would be the Yankees, and their Allies, from this time on that would push the fighting.

The marines were now at full strength—two solid divisions, except for the losses in the early fighting —and these had been heavy. Not in the history of man had there been such a desperate charge as the marines had made there in Belleau Woods, and it was to be equalled only by the charge that was to drive the enemy from Chateau Thierry.

Officers hastily looked over the decimated troops during the brief pause, as they awaited word to advance. Though their losses had been enormous, and though it seemed impossible to advance further through the hail of shells, bullets and shrapnel that poured upon them, the marines were not daunted. Their spirit was as superb as when they had first advanced confidently to the attack. Their morale was unbroken.

To the German staff, and to the German veterans themselves, it must have been a thing of wonder the way the American marines stood to their tasks. True, they were outnumbered by the enemy, but there wasn't a man there who stopped to think of that.

Reinforcements were on their way from the rear.

American regulars, and the French troops, broken by the first shock of the German advance, had had time to regain their lost cohesion and reform. But

it was not General Bundy's plan to await these reinforcements; he had the enemy on the run now and he was not disposed to surrender his advantage.

So, after a brief pause, he ordered the attack.

Wild cheers broke from the marines as they darted upon the enemy machine gunners and artillerymen who still clung to the edge of the woods. There was a sharp skirmish, and the Germans abandoned their guns and fled toward where other lines had been fortified just before Chateau Thierry.

The marines dashed forward on the very heels of the enemy.

Into the streets of the little village poured the Americans pell-mell. Here, under the command of their officers, the Germans braced and their resistance became stiffer.

But the men from Yankeeland were not to be denied. Absolutely disregarding the enemy machine-gun fire, that cut great gaps in their lines, they leaped forward with lowered bayonets. Steel clashed on steel as the fighting became hand-to-hand.

Here and there marines, crazed with battle, cast away their rifles and bayonets and dashed upon the enemy barehanded. Down went Germans before heavy blows from American fists. Groups of Germans gathered here and there and attempted to check the Americans. As well have tried to shut out a tornado.

The Prussian Guards, once the pride of the Ger-

man army, became demoralized. Some threw down their weapons and raised their hands in token of surrender. Others turned and ran. These latter the marines pursued, making captives of some and accounting for others with their rifles and bayonets.

Fiercer and fiercer the fighting raged in the streets of the little village. From one end of the streets, the enemy covered the marines with machine guns and fired rapidly as the Americans came toward them.

But this fire had no more effect than if the Germans had been spraying the marines with water. Those who survived the terrible fire leaped over the bodies of their prostrate comrades and at the throats of the Huns.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. The Germans turned and fled in utter rout.

But the work of the marines was not yet over. They pushed on to the edge of the village. Machine guns were hastily posted and manned and a destructive fire poured into the ranks of the fleeing enemy.

Soon the Germans reached the shelter of a distant woods, posted their own big guns and opened upon the exposed Yankee positions.

Instantly General Bundy gave the command to dig in again.

Weapons of warfare were immediately discarded by the marines for intrenching tools and the dirt began to fly. American artillery, meantime, hurled

high explosive shells over the heads of the marines into the German positions beyond.

Night fell and the duel of big guns continued as the marines still dug and clawed at the ground. But before midnight the newly-won positions had been made secure. Sentinels were posted and the men at last were permitted to sleep.

Not in the history of all wars has there been a victory to equal that of the American marines in Belleau Woods and at Chateau Thierry. It was wonderful. No other word will describe it. And in its effect, the result was far reaching.

Not only did the American victory enable the hard-pressed French troops, so recently driven back by the German advance, to reform; not only did it reduce the effectiveness of the German man-power, but it shattered the morale of the whole German army. It was the greatest single blow that had been struck during the war.

No wonder the tired American marines slept the sleep of the just that night. They had been the instruments that set in motion the great offensive that was to make the world safe for Democracy.

It was a glorious day for America—the seventeenth of June, 1918!

CHAPTER XXIX

BOWERS IN ACTION

It was the fate of the American marines to be at the front at a moment when the destiny of the modern world hung in the balance; and they played a part that will be gratefully remembered in America, as well as in western Europe, through generations to come.

During the day of fierce fighting, Hal and Chester had been in the foremost of the fight. They had hugged down in ravines together and together they had charged the German machine guns at the head of their men.

Many officers fell in the early hours of the battle and long before darkness cast its shadow over the battlefield captains and lieutenants were occupying the posts of colonels and majors.

Nowhere in the field were there more competent officers than Hal and Chester had long since proven themselves to be; and the company of marines whose lot it fell to the lads to lead, soon placed the utmost confidence in them.

This company, in whose ranks was Sergeant Bowers, had been one of the first to get into the fight, and although the tired men would have welcomed a moment's breathing space from time to time, they had no breathing space.

It was this company which was the first to attack the enemy in Chateau Thierry itself.

It was after one o'clock in the afternoon when the order came for the men to leave the comparative shelter of the woods and move to the attack. The men cheered wildly as the word was passed. They had been lying down and plugging away at the enemy with their rifles. Now they welcomed the chance that would bring them to hand grips. It was Chester who gave the word:

"Forward!" he cried.

Instantly the men were on their feet and streaming from the woods into the open place beyond. Their advance was greeted with a hail of machine-gun fire, and high explosive shells burst to the right and to the left of them, and in their midst. But the men were not dismayed; they showed only a greater eagerness to get in close.

Chester waved his sword aloft as he urged his troops to greater efforts. Hal, close beside his chum, also brandished his sword and flourished a revolver in his left hand.

In this manner, in spite of the havoc wreaked in their lines by the enemy fire, the marines charged

upon the German lines before Chateau Thierry.

The opposing lines met with a shock. Men stumbled forward; others reeled back and dropped to the ground to rise no more. It was a terrible spectacle, and Hal and Chester were right in the middle of it.

At this sort of fighting the Germans did not have a chance with the men from America. Flower of the German army they were, but never before had they encountered such determination, such recklessness and such an unquenchable spirit as the marines displayed.

"Give it to 'em, boys!" shouted Hal, as he parried a thrust from a German officer and fired his revolver in the man's face.

And give it to 'em the marines did!

The men had advanced, cheering; now they became strangely quiet, bending all their energies toward subduing the foe. Slowly the Germans gave ground.

Into the streets of the village the marines advanced on the very heels of the enemy. Chester and Hal posted them in little groups at advantageous points while they awaited the arrival of reinforcements, which even now could be seen advancing in the distance.

From a house to the left a machine gun crackled suddenly. Half a dozen men near Hal tumbled over. Hal acted quickly.

"Sergeant Bowers!" he called sharply. "Take a

dozen men and capture that house! Stay," he added as Bowers hurried away, "I'll go with you."

With a word to Chester, Hal dashed after Sergeant Bowers and the dozen men.

To reach the house it was necessary to brave the fire of the machine gun, which covered the approach to the building. But this Hal did not hesitate to order his men to do, for by no other means, he saw, could the place be captured, and he realized, too, that it must be captured at all hazards.

The machine gun spat viciously at the Americans, but they advanced unflinchingly. Two men fell and two others cursed, by which Hal knew they had been hit. So there were only ten men besides Hal and Sergeant Bowers who reached the house, and two of these were wounded.

At the door of the building the Americans were out of range of the machine gun, which still poured bullets over their heads. The door was locked. Bowers and a private named Timothy put their shoulders to it and it flew open with a crash.

"Upstairs, men!" cried Hal.

Bowers reached the steps first and sprang up three at a time. Hal and the others were close behind him. At the top, Bowers led the way along the narrow hall toward the room where the German machine gun was posted. The door to this room also was locked. Again Bowers and Timothy brought their sturdy shoulders into use and the door gave

way beneath their weight. At the moment of the crash, Hal shouted:

"Down on the floor, men!"

And it was well that he did so.

The German machine gunner within had acted just as Hal had surmised he would. When he heard the intruders at the door, he turned his gun so that it commanded the entrance; and when the door fell inward, he opened fire.

But thanks to Hal's prompt action, the Americans escaped unscathed. From his position on the floor, Hal raised his revolver, took careful aim and fired. The German gunner inside the room threw up his hands, staggered to his feet, spun around twice on his heel and rolled over like a log.

"All right, men," said Hal calmly. "Grab that gun."

So the gun was in the possession of the Americans, and it had been captured with the loss of only two men.

Hal approached the window and looked out. He saw Chester and his men forming to repel an attack that the enemy was about to launch. The reinforcements had not arrived yet and Chester's company faced the alternative of standing firm in the face of superior numbers or retiring. Hal saw that Chester had determined to fight it out.

"Foolish, perhaps," he told himself, "but I don't blame him. Well, maybe I can help a bit. Bowers!"

The sergeant saluted. "Train the gun on the enemy advancing there," Hal continued. "They make a good target. We should be able to break up the attack with this single gun."

Bowers needed no urging. With his own hands he whirled the gun about so it again pointed through the window. Then, without waiting for further orders, he opened fire.

The steady stream of machine-gun bullets opened a wide gap in the ranks of the oncoming enemy. As quickly as these gaps were filled by reserve troops, the gun manned by Bowers mowed them down again. There was a slight smile on Bowers' face.

"You will make us come three thousand miles to settle this argument, will you?" he muttered. "Well, you'll get more than you bargained for, Fritz; much more!"

Under the hail of bullets from the single machine gun and the rifle fire from Chester's troops below, the German line wavered along its entire length. Then the Germans broke and fled.

At the same moment, the first of the marine reinforcements poured into the streets of the village.

But Chateau Thierry had not yet been entirely cleared of the enemy. From the windows of many houses German snipers, singly and in groups, picked off the Americans from these shelters. Hal, glancing from the window, was able to see better than

was Chester below the points where lay the greatest danger to the marines.

"Bowers!" he called.

The sergeant stepped forward.

"See that house across the street?" asked Hal, pointing.

"Yes sir!"

"Good! You take five men and clean up the Germans there. I'll take the other five and drive out the enemy stationed in the house next to it."

"Very good, sir."

Bowers turned and called five marines by name. The men gathered around him and the sergeant led the way from the house. Hal, with his five marines, sallied forth after the others.

On the street, the force divided, Sergeant Bowers and his men dashed up the steps of the first house, burst open the door and disappeared within. Hal led his men next door.

As it developed, Hal had picked out the most difficult task for Sergeant Bowers and his men. As the door burst in under the blows of the marines, Sergeant Bowers, in advance, saw that the lower hall was filled with Germans.

But it was too late to draw back now. Besides, the lives of many Americans outside lay in the hands of these foes should the little party of Americans fail to conquer them.

"Down, men!" cried the sergeant, and the first

volley from the Germans passed harmlessly over their heads.

"Fire!" shouted Sergeant Bowers, and from their positions flat on the floor the five marines swung their rifles into position and blazed away.

The Germans received the bullets standing. Apparently they had no leader of such quick decision as Sergeant Bowers.

"Up and at them!" shouted the sergeant.

With a cheer the little handful of marines obeyed orders.

Another volley the Germans fired, but their nerves appeared to have been shattered and the bullets went wild with one exception. A ball pierced Sergeant Bowers' left shoulder.

With a yell of anger, Sergeant Bowers hurled his empty revolver into the very faces of the enemy and dashed forward with his naked hands, his big fingers twisting spasmodically.

"Shoot me, will you?" he howled. "Shoot me, will you? Take that!"

He struck out with his great right fist and one German soldier crumpled up and slid gently to the floor.

"Shoot me, will you?" yelled the sergeant again.

CHAPTER XXX

VICTORY

APPALLED by the fury in the face of Sergeant Bowers, the Germans retreated along the wall, two to one as they were.

"Nail 'em, Timothy!" shouted Bowers to the marine who was nearest him.

Timothy grinned and pulled the trigger of his rifle again. The other marines also poured a volley into the compact ranks of the foe. Three Germans dropped.

"Good boy!" yelled Bowers. "At 'em again!"

With wild cries, the Germans broke and fled for the steps at the end of the hall. Up these they climbed pell mell.

"After 'em, men!" shouted Bowers. "I'll lick the man who lets one of 'em get away!"

Up the steps after the Germans piled the marines.

At the top of the stairs, the Germans turned and poured a volley into the marines. One man staggered, but recovered himself and went forward again. At the end of the hall was a small ladder

which led to the roof of the building. Fear lent wings to the Germans, who shot up the ladder with swiftness and dispatch. There was a loud bang as the trap door above was dropped into place even as Bowers' head would have passed through the opening. The result was that Bowers bumped his head against the door.

"Drat 'em!" exclaimed the sergeant. "They've got clear. Well, we've got to get 'em; that's all there is about that. Timothy, you and the others hop out of here and head 'em off if they try to get down through the house to the left. I'll stay here in case they come back this way."

"But——" began Timothy.

"You heard me, didn't you?" demanded Bowers angrily. "Who's the sergeant here, I want to know, huh?"

"All right. It's your funeral," said Timothy with a shrug. "Come on, fellows."

He led the way from the house.

Meanwhile, Hal and his men, who had entered the house to the right of that in which Sergeant Bowers now stood guard alone, had encountered stiff opposition within. They found the Germans outnumbered them greatly, but Hal was not disposed to give up.

The Germans, of course, were not able to make sure of the number of the Americans and for this reason they retreated upstairs when the front door

was knocked in. They fired at the first head to show itself in the opening, but not a bullet struck home.

From the second floor, these Germans also climbed to the roof and closed the trap door, thus balking Hal and his men of their prey.

"They went up," said Hal. "They'll have to come down some time."

"They may pass on to the next house and go down that way, sir," one of the men suggested.

"They'll find Sergeant Bowers there," replied Chester significantly.

"They may go the other way, sir."

"They can't," said Hal. "I noticed as we came in that there are only three houses whose roofs are close enough to be jumped. The only danger of our losing them is that they will pass the next house and descend in the one at the end. You men get out of here quick and guard the end house."

"You mean to stay here alone, sir?"

"Exactly," said Hal. "Now hurry."

"Guess I'll try it," he said at last.

The men waited no longer.

For some moments Hal stood quietly at the foot of the ladder debating whether he should await the return of the Germans there or whether he should risk a shot and open the trap door.

He mounted the ladder rapidly and cautiously

pushed up the trap door. A strange sight met his eyes.

A dozen figures sprang from the farthest building to the one next to the lad. Behind them came three or four American marines. Hal realized at once that Sergeant Bowers had taken the same precautions he had to prevent the escape of the enemy and had sent his men, or some of them, into the far house.

The foremost German caught sight of Hal's head and with a cry stopped short on the roof of the middle building.

"Down this way!" he cried, and lifted the trapdoor of the building on which he stood.

He leaped down. Others piled after him.

"Going to be quite a scrap there," muttered Hal. "Guess I'd better take a hand."

With no thought of the risk he was running, he sprang to the roof and dashed toward the enemy. From the last of the three houses, the marines also advanced on the run.

At the foot of the ladder where he had stationed himself, Sergeant Bowers was not caught unprepared when the trapdoor was flung suddenly open and the first German leaped down.

"Thought you'd be back," he muttered.

His fist shot out as the German reached the floor and the man dropped in his tracks.

"One!" said the sergeant with a half smile. "Next!"

But the Germans came down the ladder so swiftly now that Sergeant Bowers was smothered beneath them. In vain he struck out right and left. Two men went down under his sledge-hammer blows, but the enemy arrived faster than Bowers could dispose of them.

Directly the sergeant found himself at bay, fully a dozen Germans circling about him with ugly gleams in their eyes.

It seemed that the foes had run short of ammunition; otherwise Bowers must surely have perished where he stood before help could reach him. But no shot was fired. Nevertheless, the Germans were armed with knives and daggers, while Bowers had no weapons save his two great fists.

It was apparent, however, that the cowardly foes had a wholesome respect for these fists. Each appeared afraid to close in—each waited for the next man to strike the first blow. Sergeant Bowers stood with his back to the wall and taunted them.

"Come on, you cowards!" he called. "Come in here and meet an American marine!"

The Germans muttered angrily, but no man seemed anxious to be the first to attack.

Still, it was plain to Sergeant Bowers that they must attack soon or be caught like rats in a trap. The position where the sergeant stood at bay had a

certain advantage; for the Germans to reach the steps leading to the floor below it would be necessary to pass within a few feet of him. And Sergeant Bowers had decided with himself that he would never allow the Germans to pass there while he remained alive.

The Germans now began to realize the need of haste; and this haste became greater as a marine came sliding down the ladder from the roof. With bellows of fury they sprang upon Sergeant Bowers and the new arrival.

The sergeant and the private fought as best they could. They struck out right and left with all their strength.

But gradually they felt themselves being pushed back. Bowers felt a slight pain in his left forearm as a knife found its mark. A moment later a shining blade grazed his forehead. With an angry bellow, the sergeant sprang into the very midst of his foes.

It was at this moment that Hal reached the opening in the roof and came scrambling down to the aid of the hard-pressed Americans below. From the roof of the adjoining building, the other marines now streamed to join the fight.

Realizing that the game was up in this direction, the Germans turned to flee. Bowers and the first marine to come to his assistance had been forced to

give ground enough to permit the enemy the access of the stairs leading to the ground floor.

Down these the Germans dashed madly, each man upbraiding the other for blocking his progress. At the bottom of the stairs, they hurried toward the broken front door.

Even as the first man would have stepped out, a figure in khaki appeared in the doorway, a revolver in his hand.

It was Chester, who, now that the enemy had been driven from Chateau Thierry, had come to make sure of the safety of Hal and his companions.

"Hah!" cried the foremost German, and stopped dead in his tracks.

"Hands up!" cried Chester in German.

Instead of obeying this command, however, the Germans inside turned quickly and dashed into a room on the first floor. Quickly they locked and barred the door before either Chester or the Americans descending from above could halt them.

Chester stopped before this door. His eyes searched the steps at the end of the hall down which the marines, headed by Bowers, now ran.

"Hal!" he cried.

"All right," came his chum's voice from above. "I'm here, but don't you let those fellows get away."

"Not a chance," laughed Chester as Hal, Bowers and the others came up to him. "They're in this

room here, and I guess they'll stay there until they get ready to surrender."

"But the windows?" suggested Sergeant Bowers.

"Guarded," replied Chester briefly. "By Jove, sergeant! You look like you had been in a fight."

"So I have, sir," declared the sergeant grimly, "but if you'll bother to go to the top of yonder steps you'll find half a dozen men who look a whole lot worse than I do."

"I've no doubt of it, sergeant," laughed Chester. "But you'd better have those wounds dressed."

"Not until we've rounded up the gang in there, sir," said Sergeant Bowers, pointing.

"Well, that should be simple enough," declared Hal. "Break in the door, men!"

Three marines laid their shoulders to the door and heaved lustily. There was the sound of splintering wood, and the door flew open. The marines dropped hastily to the floor, anticipating a volley of rifle bullets, but no such volley came.

Instead, Hal and Chester, looking into the room, beheld an amusing sight.

Facing the door, their hands high above their heads, their faces bearing every appearance of the utmost terror, were twelve Germans, the sole survivors of the enemy force that had defended the two houses now in the possession of the marines.

Their faces blanched as Hal, Chester and Sergeant Bowers took a step forward.

"Kamerad!" they cried. "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

It was the work of only a few minutes to make prisoners of these men, after which, under guard, they were marched out and turned over to the proper authorities.

The fighting in Chateau Thierry had ceased. The duel of big guns still raged, but the American mastery of Chateau Thierry and the whole of Belleau Woods no longer could be disputed.

It was 10 o'clock that night when Hal and Chester found themselves alone in their temporary quarters in Chateau Thierry.

"Well, we went through 'em, old boy," said Hal quietly.

"Of course," said Chester. "And from this time we'll go through 'em almost at will. And it was the Prussian Guard we licked. Think of that! The pride of the German emperor—the best troops he boasted."

"Mark my words," said Hal, "while the fighting is by no means over, this is the beginning of the end. We've met the best the enemy had to offer and it wasn't good enough. They've lost thousands upon thousands. Their morale is shattered at last. Oh, they'll probably fight on and on, but from this time forward there can be no doubt of the ultimate result."

"Right," Chester agreed. "As our friend Bowers would say, 'They're through!'"

And, as it developed, the lads were right. It was at Chateau Thierry that American marines struck the blow that broke the backbone of German resistance. However, there was to be more severe fighting and in it both Hal and Chester were to play their parts. Their later adventures will be found in a succeeding volume, entitled, "THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE GREAT ADVANCE; or, DRIVING THE FOE THROUGH FRANCE AND BELGIUM."

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